AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

SERIES THREE

AIR

VOLUME II

*AIR WAR AGAINST JAPAN 1943-1945*

# AUSTRALIA IN THE WAR OF 1939-1945

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# AIR WAR AGAINST JAPAN

## 1943-1945

*by*

GEORGE ODGERS

CANBERRA
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

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# PREFACE

THIS volume of the history of the Royal Australian Air Force in World War II begins with the first offensive against Japan and ends with the return of the R.A.A.F. to Australia after the surrender of the Japanese forces. The earlier period of the war against Japan will be described in the first volume of the air series, yet to be published. While the primary aim of the volume is to tell the story of the R.A.A.F. it has been necessary to deal, although in a less detailed way, with other forces engaged, and to sketch in the over-all picture from time to time. Failure to indicate clearly the proportion of the R.A.A.F. effort in relation to other forces would be a distortion of history. It has been necessary therefore to outline the operations of the Fifth and Thirteenth American Air Forces with which the R.A.A.F. was closely associated in its Pacific campaigns, as well as those of the ground and naval forces engaged. To complete the picture, something of the higher planning and command problems have also been included, although the emphasis remains on the operations and experiences of the Australian squadrons and the men who flew and serviced the aircraft.

The Pacific war fell into three phases. In the first the Japanese carried out a successful offensive while the Allies retreated. In this period Allied grand strategy stressed heavily the overriding importance of the European theatre of operations and the Pacific could be given only a limited share of the men and arms available. This phase ended in April 1943 when Allied resources in the Pacific had been accumulated sufficiently to permit a limited offensive. This offensive formed the second phase. In the South-West Pacific Area its aim was the breaking of the Bismarcks Barrier, and by April 1944 this had been accomplished. With still more resources becoming available a major offensive now got under way which culminated in August 1945 with the collapse of Japanese resistance. This was the third and final phase.

In World War II the men who served in the R.A.A.F. were scattered in all major war theatres, necessarily in relatively small concentrations by comparison with the Anglo-American forces they supported. Only in the South-West Pacific did the R.A.A.F. have integrated forces with their own senior commanders. This circumstance has aided the writing of the history in the S.W.P.A. The R.A.A.F. commanders worked under the direction of an American air commander who was in turn responsible to General MacArthur. Nevertheless, the R.A.A.F. took part in the planning of all phases of operations in which they were directly engaged.

Since the scope of this volume includes all aspects of the war against Japan in which Australian airmen served, it embraces the Burma campaigns in 1943-45. Here the R.A.A.F. men were, as in Britain, serving largely in R.A.F. squadrons. In Britain there were a number of distinctly Australian squadrons organised with a view to the eventual development of an Australian national air force overseas. In Burma, however, there

was not one Australian squadron, although some R.A.F. squadrons at times had a large proportion of Australians on their strengths.

Since the Australians in Burma were scattered in many squadrons and since these squadrons were engaged in varied activities, it was difficult to relate the individual effort of the Australian airmen to the over-all story of the war in Burma. Nevertheless an attempt has been made briefly to describe the operations in Burma and to recount how the Australians there contributed to the Allied effort.

In the Pacific war the R.A.A.F. faced many difficulties. It was handicapped by the inability of the major allies to make the best type of equipment available to it. There was a division of control at the top levels. In 1945 some of the veteran airmen were dissatisfied with the role the R.A.A.F. had been assigned. In dealing with these problems I tried to intrude my own views as little as possible. My greatest concern was first to present the facts objectively and then allow the reader to draw his own conclusions. At the same time I considered it my duty as an historian to interpret the facts. This I have tried to do. Others may well interpret the same facts in a different way.

In this volume, and in this history generally, Indonesian place names have as a rule been spelt in the English fashion, but in a few instances the more-familiar Dutch transliterations have been used: for example, Koepang and Noemfoor.

All available records and relevant documents were made available to the historian during the writing of this history. They are too voluminous to describe in detail. The biggest and most valuable collection is concentrated in the R.A.A.F. War History Section.

A detailed appendix describing the types of aircraft engaged in the Pacific war will appear in the first volume of this series.

Where a man is first mentioned in the text, a footnote gives brief biographical details, but names which will appear in Volume I of this series are not footnoted in this one.

My indebtedness to the many who, directly or indirectly, aided my work is very great. I wish to acknowledge particularly my debt to Mr Gavin Long, the General Editor, whose patience, wisdom and encouragement lightened my task. I was also given generous help and encouragement by many members of the R.A.A.F. and particularly by Air Vice-Marshal F. R. W. Scherger. Dr Gordon Prange, chief historian under General MacArthur in Tokyo, made available a valuable collection of Japanese documents during my six-weeks visit to G.H.Q., Tokyo, in 1951, and the story from the enemy side was also greatly helped by the reports of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey.

During the three years when I was engaged full-time on the writing of this history Miss Mary Ryan and Mr Richard Gunter of the R.A.A.F. War History Section, and Mr Ralph Clark, of the staff of the Official War Historian, were closely associated with me in research work. Mr Jack Seymour was responsible for finally preparing the volume for publication and for the detailed index. Mr Hugh Groser drew the excellent maps.

The foundations of the history were laid in the final stages of the war and immediately afterwards by Wing Commander K. Ready and his staff of narrators at the R.A.A.F. War History Section. Finally I am indebted to the R.A.A.F. for making available to me office space and facilities over a period of years.

G.O.

*Melbourne,*
*20th September 1955*

CHAPTER 1

# THE PACIFIC WAR, APRIL 1943

BY the end of 1942 it seemed to the Allies that they were ready to enter the offensive phase of the war, and that it was desirable that President Roosevelt and Mr Churchill, with their military staffs, should meet and agree on long-range plans for victory. The outcome of this need was the Casablanca conference of January 1943 at which decisions were made which vitally affected the war both in Europe and the Pacific.

At this conference the basic strategy of the Allies—"beat Hitler first" —remained unchallenged. Both British and American leaders had decided, even before the Pacific war had begun, that, when the offensive phase of the war came, they would destroy German military power first, and then be free to bring the entire weight of their military strength to bear on Japan. This strategy was supported by the air planners. "The determination to concentrate on Germany first," wrote Professor James Cate, an historian of the United States Army Air Force, "was the most momentous strategic decision of the war, both in respect to the total effort and to the role of the AAF. Apparently accepted without dissent in the previous spring, that decision seemed less unimpeachable in the flood tide of Japanese successes. It was not to go unchallenged either within high military circles or in public, but it represented a view of the war which had long been held by the air planners and from which AAF Headquarters was never to deviate."[1]

Apart from the fact that Germany was undoubtedly the major strategic prize, from the air point of view it was much more accessible to air attack from Britain, while it was yet most difficult for Allied bombers to reach the Japanese homeland.

The cogency of the "Europe first" position was strengthened by the attitude of the Russians who were urging, almost to the point of rupturing relations with Britain and the United States, that they open a major "second-front" operation against western Europe. Britain and the United States had to consider that Russia might collapse or perhaps come to terms with Hitler unless they gave her greater assistance. Marshal Stalin's idea of how to win the war was: "Hit Germany hard. Synchronize the operations of Allied troops on the two fronts, east and west. Then hit the Germans from both sides where it hurts most. Hit her where the distance to Berlin is shortest. Don't waste time, men or equipment on secondary fronts."[2]

As far as Japan was concerned, however, Stalin would in no circumstances be drawn into a two-front war and while Germany was undefeated he would treat the Japanese as neutrals. Again, German scientists, as well

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[1] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I (1948), p. 238.

[2] Quoted by General H. H. Arnold in *Global Mission* (1949), p. 481.

as those of Britain and America, were working on the production of guided missiles, jet-propelled aircraft, an atomic bomb and other powerful new weapons to which Britain, because of her nearness to the European continent, would be exposed if German armed power could not be destroyed in time. The Allies feared the Germans might outstrip them in the race for an atomic bomb, although there was little reliable information on German progress.[3] On the other hand, the Japanese were unlikely to produce an atomic weapon and the chances of Japanese soldiers or airmen attacking the British and American homelands were remote.

However, although they reaffirmed the over-all policy of concentrating on Europe first, the leaders who met at Casablanca quickly came to the conclusion that they could not mount a major operation against western Europe in 1943, because not until the spring of 1944 could American and British military resources be mobilised in sufficient strength. It was a vital pre-requisite to this build-up that the supply line across the north Atlantic should be secured from the devastating attacks of the U-boats. In March 1943, sinkings of Allied shipping had reached a war-time record of 687,000 tons. The tonnage of merchantmen destroyed in 1942 had totalled 7,795,000. Because of these heavy losses the highest priority of all was allocated at Casablanca to the defeat of the U-boat. Another vital prelude to the invasion from Britain was that the Allied air forces should gain command of the air over Europe and carry out strategic bombardments to weaken the German war potential.

Since a cross-Channel invasion was ruled out for 1943, the question arose what to do with the forces already available, and the Americans argued strongly that a larger share of Allied resources should be used in the Pacific war. Churchill, on the other hand, was anxious to strike "at the 'under-belly' of the Axis (in the Mediterranean) in effective strength and in the shortest time", coupled with an intensified strategic bombing of Germany. Behind this Mediterranean strategy was the belief that it was necessary to keep the Germans heavily engaged until the main struggle began.

General Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the American Army, and Admiral King, the Chief of Naval Operations, while they believed that the Allies must concentrate on the defeat of Germany first, argued that this must be done in a major cross-Channel invasion, and feared that the operations in the Mediterranean proposed by the British would dissipate forces which should be reserved for this invasion. Marshall and King therefore opposed the British strategy and argued for a much bigger allocation for the Pacific war. Because of the slow progress there and the extreme tenacity of the enemy resistance they feared that the Allies would not be able to hold the initiative, and considered it necessary to give the Pacific commanders more men and equipment so that the gains would be held and the enemy would not be able to consolidate his defences.

[3] Chester Wilmot in *The Struggle for Europe* (1952), p. 662, wrote that when in November 1944, the Allies entered Strasbourg they discovered that the German Professor Fleischmann and his associates had not succeeded in producing a chain reaction. They were about as far ahead as the Allies were in 1940.

Admiral King had caused a rough estimate to be made of the percentage of the total effort (men, ships, planes and munitions) of all the Allies, including Russia and China, then employed in the Pacific. He reached the surprising conclusion that only 15 per cent of the total Allied resources then engaged were employed in the whole of the Pacific, including the Indian Ocean, Burma and China. European and African theatres, the Battle of the Atlantic and the British build-up were getting the remaining 85 per cent. At the Casablanca Conference King and Marshall brought these figures forward, insisting that the imbalance might be fatal. They agreed that Germany was the Number One enemy and renounced any expectation of defeating Japan before Germany was eliminated; but they said bluntly that unless the United States could retain the initiative against Japan, a situation might arise which would necessitate her withdrawing from commitments in the European theatre. King and Marshall . . . insisted that the percentage of total forces deployed in the Pacific must be raised to at least 30 per cent.[4]

While King and Marshall adhered to the basic "Europe first" strategy, there were many leaders, of whom General MacArthur, the Commander-in-Chief in the South-West Pacific Area, was perhaps an outstanding example, who felt that it was a mistake. MacArthur, late in 1942 when the situation in New Guinea was still fluid, told Mr Stimson, the American Secretary of War, that "unless decisive steps were taken to match the Japanese strength, continued and growing disaster could be anticipated". The Allies, he said, should open a "second front" in the Pacific to help Russia. There were also many military and political leaders of the Pacific countries which lived and struggled uneasily in the shadow of Japanese power, who resented what they considered was an unreasonable concentration on the European scene. General MacArthur, the Australian Prime Minister (Mr Curtin), the Commander-in-Chief of the Australian Army (General Blamey), and the Commander of the Allied Air Forces in the South-West Pacific, General Kenney, all made public statements urging the allotment of more aircraft to the South-West Pacific; and some newspapers both in Australia and America began a campaign to this end. The Hearst group of newspapers particularly and a group of American senators led by Senator Chandler demanded more attention to the Pacific war and more support for MacArthur.

Mr Curtin, when he heard that Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt were conferring at Casablanca, sent them a cablegram on 19th January asking for 1,500 additional operational and 500 additional transport aircraft and more naval aid. Two weeks later, on 3rd February, Mr Calwell (Labour) declared in the House of Representatives that Australia had a right to ask that sufficient aircraft should be sent for the defence of Australia.[5]

"The tenacity and methodical comprehensiveness of the campaign [for aid for the Pacific war]," wrote Joseph Harsch, of the *Christian Science*

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[4] S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol VI (1950), pp. 4-5.

[5] General Arnold in his first report to the Secretary of War said: "It was necessary for us to parcel out our airplanes among the many who urgently needed them in much the same manner that water from the last canteen is distributed among a party lost in the desert. . . . We had to steel ourselves against appeals not only from the various air forces fighting so valiantly against the enemy, but also against equally determined agencies in this country."

*Monitor,* "leaves Washington curious, baffled and almost resentful." The Melbourne *Herald* of 15th April, in a leading article said: "The extent and severity of the Japanese air raid upon Milne Bay [on April 14] fully bears out the grave warnings of the Prime Minister, General MacArthur and General Sir Thomas Blamey of the seriousness of the new menace to Australia and to the Allies, of Japan's growing air strength in the north and of its concentration in the perimeter of island bases about our coasts. The tendency here to overrate our own recent successes has made it difficult for the public mind both in Australia and abroad to realise the real truth of the situation."

The Casablanca conference ended in a compromise. It came to the following decisions. The cross-Channel invasion would be delayed until 1944, but in order to assist Russia, operations would be undertaken in the Mediterranean. There would be a stepped-up combined air offensive against Germany with the object of reducing Germany's war potential and thus preparing the way for a successful amphibious assault against western Europe. General Eisenhower would be informed that an attack on Sicily was to be launched in July 1943, but the American Joint Chiefs did not commit themselves to operations in the Mediterranean after Sicily. The first charge on United Nations' resources would be the defeat of the U-boat. The second charge would be assistance to Russia followed by operations in the Mediterranean (the third charge). The fourth charge would be "the build-up in the United Kingdom". Operations in the Pacific and Far Eastern theatres came only fifth in the order of priority.

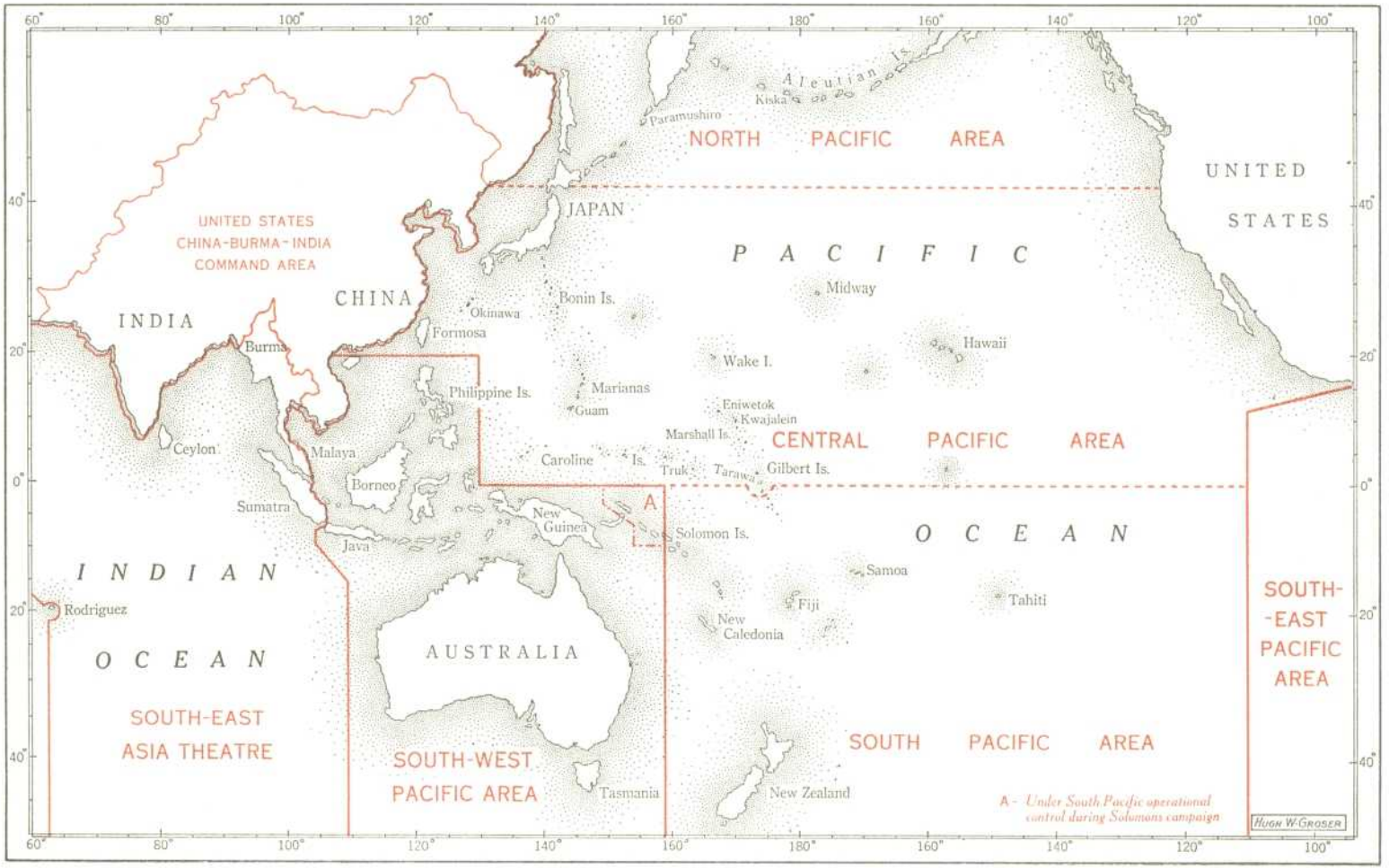
Specifically, operations approved for the Pacific in 1943 were:

1. To continue the advance from Guadalcanal and New Guinea until Rabaul had been taken and the Bismarcks Barrier broken.
2. To advance westward towards Truk and Guam.
3. To make the Aleutians as secure as possible.
4. To advance along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis as far as Timor.
5. To recapture Burma in order to help China by (*a*) amphibious assaults on Ramree Island and Akyab, (*b*) invasion of north Burma by British and Chinese ground forces to open a land route to China and prepare for (*c*) an all-out offensive to re-open the Burma Road and occupy all Burma.

The first and fourth of these tasks concerned General MacArthur's South-West Pacific forces.

All air forces engaged in battle and other operational duties in the South-West Pacific Area were organised under and directed by a command headquarters known as "Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area".[6] Lieut-General Kenney commanded these forces, which comprised the Fifth American Air Force; all operational squadrons of the Royal Australian Air Force assigned to the South-West Pacific Area, with their

[6] When the governments of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands set up "South-West Pacific Area" in 1942 they allotted strategic responsibility for it to the United States. Under MacArthur, as Supreme Commander, were set up three subordinate commands: Allied Land Forces, Allied Air Forces and Allied Naval Forces.




Boundaries of Allied Areas of Command.

service units; one Royal Air Force squadron; and one Netherlands Air Force squadron. In April 1943 Kenney's force included sixty-nine squadrons:

| | *Squadrons* | |
|---|---|---|
| *United States*: | | |
| Fighters | 9 | |
| Dive bombers | 5 | |
| Medium and general reconnaissance bombers | 6 | |
| Heavy bombers | 8 | |
| Transport aircraft | 8 | |
| | — | 36 |
| *Australia*: | | |
| Fighters | 9 | |
| Attack and long-range fighters | 2 | |
| Army cooperation | 2 | |
| Dive bombers | 4 | |
| Medium and general reconnaissance bombers | 7 | |
| General reconnaissance flying-boats | 2 | |
| Torpedo | 1 | |
| Reconnaissance and anti-submarine patrol | 3 | |
| Fleet cooperation | 1 | |
| | — | 31 |
| *Great Britain*: | | |
| Fighters | 1 | |
| | — | 1 |
| *Netherlands*: | | |
| Medium and general reconnaissance bomber | 1 | |
| | — | 1 |
| | | 69 |

Of the thirty-one Australian squadrons, twenty-four, in addition to the Netherlands bomber squadron (No. 18, armed with Mitchells), the British fighter squadron (No. 54, armed with Spitfires), and one American heavy bomber squadron (No. 319, equipped with Liberators), had been assigned by General Kenney to the control of Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command. Kenney had assigned the remaining seven Australian operational squadrons to the direct operational control of the Fifth Air Force. These squadrons were organised in an Australian formation, No. 9 Operational Group, commanded by Air Commodore Hewitt.

In addition to the thirty-one R.A.A.F. squadrons which the Australian government had allotted to the Allied Air Forces, there were eight more Australian squadrons in the South-West Pacific Area. Of these five were transport squadrons, and the remaining three—No. 43 (General Reconnaissance Flying-Boat), No. 79 (Fighter), and No. 8 (Torpedo)—were combat squadrons not yet assigned to Allied Air Forces. Two regular Australian squadrons (Nos. 3 and 10) and No. 1 Air Ambulance Unit, in addition to a number of squadrons formed under the Empire Air

Training Scheme, were serving with the Royal Air Force in the Middle East and the United Kingdom, and large numbers of individual Australians were serving with Royal Air Force squadrons in the United Kingdom, the Middle East and India.

The types of aircraft operated by the Australian Air Force in the Pacific at the end of April 1943 were:

| | Serviceable (ready for operations) | Unserviceable (temporarily unfit for operations) | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Fighters | 299 | 224 | 523 |
| Medium bombers | 156 | 228 | 384 |
| Dive bombers (Vultee Vengeance) | 18 | 90 | 108 |
| General purpose (Buffalo, Lancer and Wirraway) | 83 | 86 | 169 |
| Reconnaissance | 42 | 35 | 77 |
| Transport | 31 | 39 | 70 |
| Miscellaneous | 60 | 50 | 110 |
| Totals | 689 | 752 | 1,441 |

There were then 143,992 men and women serving in the Australian Air Force, and of these 16,746 were overseas, mainly in Canada, the United Kingdom, the Middle East, and India. Of the 127,246 in the Pacific area, a total of 29,349 were still under training and 2,616 were on the sick list. There were 496 officers and 15,299 airwomen in the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force.

While the Australian Air Force thus devoted its major effort to the Pacific war, it was, at the same time, responsible for contributing heavily, especially in aircrews, to the Royal Air Force in other theatres of war, whereas the Australian Army now had its entire effort concentrated in the Pacific.

The specific tasks allotted to the R.A.A.F. in the Pacific were: (*a*) offensive action against the enemy forward bases, particularly those established in Timor, New Britain, New Guinea and the Solomon Islands; (*b*) local air defence; (*c*) coast reconnaissance and protection of shipping; (*d*) cooperation with the fixed defences at Darwin, Fremantle, Melbourne, Brisbane and the Sydney-Newcastle area; (*e*) direct cooperation with the navy; and (*f*) cooperation with the field army by reconnaissance, protection against enemy aircraft and direct attack of the opposing forces.

The Fifth Air Force had 35,000 men in Australia and New Guinea and had received a total of 2,284 aircraft of which 538 had been lost in accidents and 385 to enemy action. It had 772 first-line aircraft available for immediate action, compared with 689 available to the R.A.A.F. There had been little growth in the aircraft strength of the Fifth Air

Force since October 1942 because the allocations made from American production had been only about enough to replace wastage.[7]

The Fifth Air Force, with its seven Australian squadrons, had responsibility for operations in Papua, New Guinea and north-eastern Australia, while R.A.A.F. Command controlled operations for the defence of the rest of Australia, in addition to having responsibility for reconnaissance and bomber operations from the Darwin area against the Japanese bases in the Netherlands East Indies. The arrangement, however, was not inflexible. Australian squadrons—for example, those in No. 9 Group—were attached to the Fifth Air Force, while the Fifth frequently furnished squadrons to Bostock's R.A.A.F. Command on request.

The Fifth Air Force, which Kenney had placed under the direct control of Major-General Whitehead, had been under considerable strain throughout the Papuan campaign and was now forced to husband its bomber strength. Of 60 Liberator bombers in No. 90 Group, only 15 could be counted on for a striking force after the campaign. The strain on bomber squadrons had been reduced, however, by the fact that it was now possible to base some of the heavy bombers at Port Moresby and Milne Bay. Six of the seven airfields lying within 30 miles of Port Moresby were in constant use and the development of Dobodura into a major operating base was well under way.

In New Guinea, Whitehead had nine American and two Australian fighter squadrons—Nos. 75 and 77. The Australians were armed with Kittyhawk aircraft. The Americans had a total of 330 fighters, including eighty Lightnings, the two-engined aircraft which was beginning to replace the Kittyhawk in the American squadrons. The Kittyhawk had not performed very successfully in air combat against the Japanese single-engined fighter because of its slower rate of climbing and its inability to operate at high levels. At 18,000 feet the performance of the Kittyhawk was sluggish and fighter pilots had reported "a feeling of hopelessness when unable to outclimb the enemy". The Lightning aircraft had a better performance; of a total of 127 Lightnings which had been received, only four had been lost in air combat to the enemy. This compared with 425 Kittyhawks received, of which 51 had been lost in combat, and 140 Airacobras, of which 33 had been lost. Because of its relatively poor performance, the Kittyhawk had to be used largely in hit-and-run attacks against enemy Zeros. The Zero was a lightly-armoured aircraft compared with the heavy construction of the Kittyhawk. It was much more manoeuvrable, but broke up easily under the fire of .5-calibre machine-guns with which the Kittyhawk was armed.

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[7] The following table indicates the comparative strength of the force in first-line aircraft between October 1942 and April 1943:

| | Oct 1942 | Apr 1943 |
|---|---|---|
| Fighter aircraft | 364 | 298 |
| Bomber aircraft | 235 | 233 |
| Transport aircraft | 62 | 97 |
| Miscellaneous aircraft | 67 | 144 |
| | 728 | 772 |

Arrayed against the Allied forces in the South and South-West Pacific Areas, the Japanese, in April, had three armies, comprising eight divisions. Six of these divisions were controlled by General Imamura's *Eighth Area Army* with headquarters at Rabaul. These divisions were grouped into the *XVII Army,* which was deployed in the Solomons-New Britain area, and the *XVIII Army,* deployed on the New Guinea mainland. The *XVII Army* comprised the *6th, 17th* and *38th Divisions,* and the *XVIII Army* the *20th, 41st,* and *51st Divisions.* Another Army, the *XIX,* comprising the *5th* and *48th Divisions,* was deployed in the islands north of Darwin. Compared with these forces the Allies had six divisions as well as a powerful fleet under Admiral Halsey in the South Pacific Area, while General MacArthur had a total of two American and twelve Australian divisions, as well as Kenney's air forces.

Opposed to the American, Australian and New Zealand air forces in the Solomon Islands-New Guinea areas were airmen of both the Japanese army and navy air forces, the latter being under Admiral Kusaka, the naval commander at Rabaul. Enemy air formations with headquarters at Rabaul were:

Army: *Fourth Air Army* { *6th Air Division*, *7th Air Division*

Navy: *XI Air Fleet* { *25th Air Flotilla*, *26th Air Flotilla*

Most of the Japanese squadrons in these formations were based at Rabaul and the northern Solomons, and the total strength, including carrier aircraft sent from Truk in March 1943 for a special offensive, was 400. Estimates made by the Allies at this time of enemy air strength were close to this figure. North of Darwin, the *23rd Air Flotilla* of the *XI Air Fleet* and a number of Japanese army air formations were operating against Air Commodore Bladin's North-Western Area force.

The over-extension of Japanese naval power into the Guadalcanal area and the attempt to take Port Moresby had greatly strained Japan's resources in ships and aircraft.[8] Losses could not be replaced quickly enough because of the shortage of materials and skilled labour. Nevertheless, every effort was made to expand air force strength at Rabaul and increase the aircrew training program. This was done in spite of an impending fuel shortage brought about primarily by the sinking by American and British submarines of a large number of Japanese tankers.[9]

The high Japanese aircraft losses in the Rabaul area were later attributed by an *XI Fleet* staff officer to the superiority of American fighter aircraft, the breakdown of the Japanese aircraft supply system, and the inability of the Japanese to replace experienced pilots and maintenance staff. After February 1943, according to this officer, the morale of Japanese pilots had fallen because they were not given home leave. They tended

[8] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials,* Vol II, pp. 313-26: Admiral Toyoda. (After the war a group entitled the United States Strategic Bombing Survey interrogated many Japanese officers.)

[9] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations,* Vol I, p. 135: Admiral Katsumata.

to exaggerate the damage they inflicted on Allied air and surface forces; they continually discussed the relative merits of Japanese and American aircraft, and were convinced they were flying greatly inferior machines. Japanese air planners had calculated that annual losses of between 20 or 30 per cent might be expected, but this had proved too low, and after 1943 the training of pilots was reorganised on the assumption that 50 per cent of aircrews would be lost.[1]

After March 1943 reinforcements of carrier aircraft were sent to Rabaul from Japan. Their purpose was to join with the army air units in joint actions against Allied positions in the Solomons and New Guinea. In addition, during this period, reinforcements for the *Fourth Air Army* were ferried from Burma and Japan along the north New Guinea coast or through Truk. The *12th Army Air Regiment,* which had arrived in December from Burma, was absorbed into the *Fourth Air Army*. The *12th Regiment's* fighter pilots were the best of the army airmen at Rabaul, and to reach this area had ferried their aircraft from Burma to Surabaya, then an aircraft carrier had taken them from Surabaya to Truk whence they had flown down to Rabaul.[2] Three more air regiments had followed by May 1943. About 6 per cent of the aircraft were lost in accidents or from bad navigation. The *Fourth Air Army,* at its peak, had a strength of 20,000 men.

In May 1943 a conference took place between Admiral Kusaka and Vice-Admiral Kondo, commander of the *Second Fleet* at Truk, and it was decided to continue bringing reinforcements from Japan so that Rabaul, the Solomons and the Vitiaz Strait area could be held. The possibility of American attacks in the Marshalls, Gilberts, Solomons and eastern New Guinea areas was realised and the *Second Fleet* was to remain at Truk to meet these threats. Admiral Yamamoto, before his death in April 1943, and Admiral Koga, his successor, believed that Japan's only chance of success in the war lay in a decisive engagement with the American fleet. Koga hoped to draw the Americans into an area where he would have the support of land-based aircraft to compensate for his weakness in carrier aircraft. Rabaul had to be held to protect Truk which was an all-important fleet base.

Many Japanese leaders considered that continuation of the war against China while involved with America was a grave error because of the vast differences in production capacities of Japan and America. The Japanese navy and army was extended with insufficient men and weapons over an enormous area. Problems were aggravated by the clash in opinion between army and navy factions and their inability to work closely together, a condition which worried the Emperor and people in general.[3] The defeat at Guadalcanal was publicised as a "grand sublime operation" and knowledge of the shortages of material and shipping were kept from the people, with the result that they could not (according to Admiral Toyoda) bring

[1] Admiral Katsumata.

[2] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations,* Vol II, p. 499: Colonel Tanaka.

[3] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations,* Vol I: Admiral Ozawa; Vol II: Admiral Toyoda.

themselves to the proper state of mind called for by the Government slogan: "100,000,000 people, united and ready to die for the nation."

Reluctantly, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, had come round to accepting the decisions of the Casablanca conference which had confirmed the intention of the British and Americans to concentrate the main effort in Europe until Germany had been defeated. He said, in April 1943: "To our Allies I say that the Australian Government accepts global strategy insofar as it conditions Australia's employment as an offensive base until Hitler is beaten." Curtin agreed that the Pacific war should be a "holding war" until Hitler was beaten, but he was determined to urge that sufficient arms, particularly aircraft, should be sent to Australia so that the holding war would in fact hold. He said that Australia "would not accept a flow of materials, notably aircraft, which does not measure up to the requirements of a holding war".

The Australian Government wanted the R.A.A.F., which in April had only 31 squadrons, to be expanded during 1943 to 45 and eventually to 73 squadrons, the ultimate goal laid down by the War Cabinet in 1942. Curtin followed up his signal of January 1943 to Roosevelt and Churchill, asking for 1,500 combat and 500 transport aircraft for the South-West Pacific, by sending Dr Evatt, the Minister for External Affairs, on a special mission to Washington and the United Kingdom to press Australia's case for more aircraft. On 30th March, disturbed by the slow delivery of aircraft to the Royal Australian Air Force he again signalled to Roosevelt and Churchill:

> I am very disturbed at the delay in delivery of aircraft from the United States. We were told last August that 397 aircraft were to be made available to the R.A.A.F. from U.S. production, under the plan then approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff for expansion to 30 squadrons. The present position is that only 160 have been shipped. As a result, it has been necessary to completely revise the development program. Air crews which have been trained and supporting units which had been formed and equipped in anticipation of receiving these aircraft allocations had to be absorbed in other directions.

General Kenney also strongly urged the sending of more aircraft. "We were going downhill fast," he wrote, "and if the replacements and reinforcements I was promised in Washington didn't start coming soon I was going to be in a bad way."[4] He signalled General Arnold informing him that, according to the promises given in Washington, deliveries for April were short by 224 aircraft.[5]

Early in April, Curtin informed Evatt that he had learnt from MacArthur that a total of 860 additional aircraft were to be made available to the South-West Pacific. Curtin added: "General MacArthur has suggested that you should aim at obtaining aircraft for the R.A.A.F. program of 73 squadrons. . . . MacArthur suggests that the aircraft for the further expansion of the R.A.A.F. should come from the allotment made to the

[4] G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports* (1949), p. 237.
[5] Kenney, p. 241.

United Kingdom from the United States and urges that you should press this point of view with Mr Churchill."

On 4th April however, Curtin learned from the Australian Minister to Washington, Sir Owen Dixon,[6] that, in consequence of Kenney's representations, it had been decided to increase the United States Army Air Corps in the South-West Pacific, but that the United States staff did not contemplate increasing the allocation of aircraft to the R.A.A.F. The surprising information had emerged that Kenney had given his opinion to the American Chiefs of Staff that it would be difficult enough for the R.A.A.F. to man the 45 squadrons to be developed in 1943 without any further increase. While, therefore, General MacArthur was urging the Prime Minister to obtain aircraft for Australia's ambitious program of 73 squadrons, his subordinate, General Kenney, was advising Washington that it would be difficult for the R.A.A.F. to man even 45 squadrons in 1943.

Mr Curtin immediately sought an assurance from Mr Drakeford, the Minister for Air, that the Air Force could use the aircraft if they were allotted, and at the same time he asked General MacArthur to support Australia's claim for additional aircraft.

In response to Mr Curtin's request, Air Vice-Marshal Jones, the Chief of the Air Staff, reported on 7th April that training capacity existed in Australia to train sufficient men to man not only the 45 squadrons already approved but a considerably larger force. His report added: "There is no question of there being insufficient aircrew to man any number of aircraft which are likely to be assigned because of the agreement with the United Kingdom that any aircrew trained for the R.A.A.F. could be retained here . . . aircraft assigned to the R.A.A.F. would be unreservedly available for employment under the orders of the Commander, Allied Air Force, General Kenney. . . . It is desired that pressure be brought to bear to ensure that deliveries are forthcoming and that a reasonably even flow is maintained so that training and planning for personnel and equipment is not taken in advance of the available aircraft with the consequent failure to develop the maximum striking force in the shortest possible time."

Accordingly, on 20th April, Curtin cabled to Evatt informing him that the 73-squadron program was within the capacity of the R.A.A.F. and asking him to dispel any doubt that might exist as to the operational use of aircraft made available to the R.A.A.F. "Such aircraft are assigned unreservedly for employment under the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, SWPA," the cablegram stated. Curtin also informed Evatt that General MacArthur unreservedly endorsed the statement of the Australian needs.

Dr Evatt thereupon vigorously pressed his case in Washington.[7] He saw Churchill and was hopeful of securing his support, but on 5th May

[6] Rt Hon Sir Owen Dixon, GCMG. Justice of High Court 1929-52, Chief Justice since 1952; Aust Minister to Washington 1942-44. Of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Hawthorn, 28 Apr 1886.

[7] Admiral Leahy in *I Was There* (1950), p. 182, wrote: "A frequent visitor in the late spring was the Australian Minister of Defence [sic], Dr Herbert Evatt who wanted more planes of various types

Roosevelt informed him it was not possible to permit any revision of allocations and that the recent conference of high-ranking United States commanders in the Pacific had resulted in decisions materially strengthening the combined air forces in the Pacific theatre.

On 12th June, however, Evatt, just before leaving for Britain, cabled Curtin that the President approved of the allocation to Australia of approximately 475 planes for the purpose of expanding the R.A.A.F. during 1943-45. Some of the planes, "probably dive-bombers and fighters", would be sent at once. Curtin announced in the House of Representatives on 22nd June that this would mean a 60 per cent increase in the strength of the R.A.A.F., and that Dr Evatt had performed a great service for Australia in securing these additional air reinforcements.

However, the promise of additional aircraft did not produce the expected results. From American production in 1943 only the following aircraft were to be made available as a result of Dr Evatt's visit:

| | |
|---|---|
| Vengeance . . | 34 |
| Kittyhawk . . | 60 |
| Catalina . . | 12 |
| Shrike . . . | 150 |
| Mariner . . . | 12 |
| Norseman . . | 14 |
| | 282 |

Within nine months General Kenney had ordered all Vengeance aircraft out of New Guinea as being unsuitable.[8] Kittyhawks were being superseded overseas by Lightnings, Mustangs and Thunderbolts, all of which had a much better performance. None of the 150 Shrikes were delivered in 1943 and in any case the original order was reduced to 10, the remainder being declared "surplus to requirements". The Mariners and Norseman aircraft were used as transports, so that the net gain in operational aircraft was small.

In any case, however, the shortage of manpower, as General Kenney had contended, was making it difficult for the R.A.A.F. to increase in size. There had been an extensive call-up of Australian manpower immediately after the outbreak of war with Japan and by January 1943 this had resulted in a serious lack of balance in the Australian war effort. It was estimated by the War Commitments Committee that in order to fulfil the then-existing program for the Services and war industry up to June 1943, a monthly intake of about 35,000 persons into the Services and aircraft and munition production would be needed. Of this number, 16,000 men and 6,000 women would be required for the Services. It was con-

for the Australian Air Force. . . . Evatt specifically asked me to tell the President of the political difficulties being caused by his government's failure to obtain planes from us. I don't think I gave Dr Evatt much encouragement, . . . although we were providing Australia with such planes as could be spared from other areas where the demands were greater."

[8] Altogether, Australia ordered 400 of these aircraft of which all but 56 had not already been shipped when the order was cancelled. While Kenney would not have the aircraft in the South-West Pacific Area, it was being used apparently with satisfactory results in the Burma theatre, where the RAF and Indian Air Force operated several squadrons of them. However, the targets in Burma were close by British airfields.

sidered, however, that only 10,000 of the 35,000 required would be available, and that even this proportion could only be maintained by continued restrictions on the use of manpower for civil purposes. In view of the shortage of manpower, the War Cabinet decided as a general principle, that "no further commitments could be undertaken for the provision of personnel for service overseas".[9]

Mr Curtin elaborated on this decision a few weeks later in the House of Representatives when he said:

> I consider it a fallacy to suggest that a small nation like Australia, confronted with the problem of defending a large continent with a small population, should be expected, when faced with a life-and-death struggle in its own region, to send forces to other theatres. It is not in the same position as are the great nations, which after providing for the security of their home territories have a substantial margin of strength for service in other parts of the world. The only test by which this question can be judged is the facts of the military situation. It is a plain fact that Australian strength is not sufficient to meet all the contingencies of the military situation with which it may at any time be confronted and the strength of the Allied Forces in the South-West Pacific Area is inadequate to provide for more than a holding strategy with limited offensive action.

The air force found in 1943 that actual enlistments were falling far short of the allotments of manpower made to it by the War Cabinet, and this deficiency was being reflected in shortages in formations in the battle areas. No. 9 Operational Group, in New Guinea, for example, had a deficiency of 1,000 airmen in March 1943.

In New Guinea the manpower problem was intensified by the high wastage from tropical diseases—malaria, dysentery and dengue. Indeed, from the period 31st October 1942 to 22nd January 1943, tropical diseases had accounted for 80 per cent of R.A.A.F. casualties. In June 1943 it was estimated that, by the end of that year, the R.A.A.F.'s strength would be 8,000 below establishment, while in April 1943 the army had an effective strength of 458,000, a deficiency of 55,000 on what the Commander-in-Chief, General Blamey, then considered should be the minimum.

By the middle of 1943 the situation had further deteriorated, and Curtin directed the Defence Committee and manpower authorities to examine the war effort as a whole, including the planned expansion of the air force, bearing in mind this difficult manpower situation.

In July, government policy on the conduct of the war was crystallised in a War Cabinet decision, which laid down the governing principle that Australia should make its maximum contribution to the war in the South-West Pacific Area.[1] The nature and extent of the Australian contribution would be subject to MacArthur's strategic plan of operations as approved by the American Joint Chiefs of Staff and as related to the "global strategy" laid down by the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff. Contributions beyond the South-West Pacific Area were justifiable only when they could be peculiarly made by Australia to the efforts of the Allied nations, for example, the supply of foodstuffs to Britain. If

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[9] War Cabinet Minute 2548, 11 Jan 1943.
[1] War Cabinet Minute 2968, 13 Jul.

the grand strategists assembled at Casablanca had insisted on the "beat Hitler first" policy, then Australians were equally determined that their country at least would now concentrate its main armed forces in the Pacific.

Projects which might not provide a contribution to the war effort for some time and yet absorb the labour of men and women and production resources, would not be adopted unless:

1. Recommended by the Commander-in-Chief.
2. Approved by War Cabinet by reason of the fact that they would create important and essential production resources in the post-war period.
3. Satisfactory assurances for the supply of war needs from overseas could not be obtained.

With no improvement likely in the manpower situation, the Government on 1st October 1943 at length decided that the 73-squadron plan could not be realised and decided to "stabilise" the R.A.A.F. at its "present strength" in Australia:

| | |
|---|---|
| Operational squadrons . . | 37 |
| Transport squadrons . . | 6 |
| Reserve squadrons . . . | 5 |
| Total . . . | 48 |

Strength in Australia, however, could be further built up from squadrons that might be transferred from overseas and any further strength that could be maintained from a monthly intake of 2,450 men and 1,050 women allotted to the air force.[2]

By December 1942, some tension had developed in the higher command of the air force because of the differences of view between Mr Drakeford and the Air Board on the one hand, and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock on the other, over the precise limits of Bostock's powers as the operational commander of the formation called R.A.A.F. Command which controlled most of the Australian squadrons then engaged in action against the Japanese. The dispute had had its origin in a decision made in April 1942 which separated the operational from the administrative functions of the air force in the South-West Pacific Area. This decision was made by War Cabinet on the advice of the Advisory War Council. The decision (War Cabinet Minute 2127 of 28th April 1942) was as follows:

"On the recommendation of the Advisory War Council (Minute 916), the following interpretation of the decision relating to the assignment of Australian Forces to the Supreme Command was approved:

With the Service squadrons there is also assigned R.A.A.F. Area Headquarters, Area Combined Headquarters, all Fighter Sector Headquarters and such Station Headquarters as have been established for the operational control of R.A.A.F. service squadrons.

Operational control of the R.A.A.F. service squadrons and necessary Operational Headquarters as indicated above, is vested in the Commander of the Allied Air Forces.

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[2] War Cabinet Minute 3065, 1 Oct 1943.

The Australian Chief of the Air Staff will be responsible for all matters associated with R.A.A.F. personnel, provision and maintenance of aircraft, supply and equipment, works and buildings and training. These functions are not assigned to the Commander-in-Chief."

Air Vice-Marshal Bostock strongly criticised the resulting dual control within the Air Force.[3] But he was not alone. All those who became involved in the dispute, including Mr Curtin, General MacArthur, General Kenney, Mr Drakeford, Air Vice-Marshal Jones and the Air Board, were unanimous in condemning it. In view of this unanimity it was remarkable that the arrangement was allowed to remain as long as it did.

The controversy, which had begun in September 1942, was still unresolved in April 1943 and Curtin feared that the turmoil created by the division of responsibility would have a bad effect in American quarters on the supply of the necessary aircraft, and their use by General Kenney. In the meantime, Curtin had consulted General Blamey (on 9th March), through the Secretary of the Department of Defence, asking him whether he considered that, if unified operational and administrative control of the R.A.A.F. was to be given effect, this should be done by the appointment of an Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F., and the abolition of the Air Board, on the lines adopted by the army where the Commander-in-Chief exercised both operational and administrative control. In the course of his reply Blamey wrote:

I am sure that it will not be possible to bring the whole weight of the R.A.A.F. to bear against the enemy until an Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F., is appointed and the Air Board abolished, on similar lines to those adopted in the Army. It is impossible to separate operational and administrative command since the whole object of administrative organisation is to ensure the maximum operational capacity against the enemy.

Curtin therefore recommended to the War Cabinet that they appoint an Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F., who would be responsible to Kenney for the operational control of the R.A.A.F. and to Drakeford for administration and all matters other than operations.[4] On 15th April the War Cabinet adopted this proposal, and it was agreed that Curtin should ask the Australian High Commissioner in London (Mr Bruce) to obtain from the British Government the services of a suitable Australian officer serving in the Royal Air Force. The Government directed that the position of the Air Board would be decided when this air officer commanding had been appointed and in the meantime efforts were to be continued to make the existing arrangements work.

In the meantime, the Air Board, taking the matter into its own hands, issued orders transferring Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to the posting of Air Officer Commanding, North-Western Area (a subordinate formation of R.A.A.F. Command), and Air Commodore Hewitt to the posting held by Bostock. This action was supported by Drakeford who proposed these

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[3] For a detailed account of the origins and early development of this problem the reader is referred to D. Gillison, *Royal Australian Air Force 1939-1942*.

[4] War Cabinet Minute 2782, 15 Apr 1943.

changes to Curtin on 15th April, the day on which the War Cabinet met to discuss the R.A.A.F. problem. However, Curtin rejected Drakeford's proposals, pointing out that an arrangement existed whereby any changes in the appointments of commanders of the Allied naval, land and air forces would only be made in consultation with the American Government.

Curtin cabled Bruce on 28th April, telling him that there was a danger that unless the situation was firmly grasped by a capable officer, the Australian air effort might become prejudiced in the eyes of the Americans. He said: "General MacArthur's mission to Washington having secured an increased allotment of aircraft for the United States Air Force in the SWPA, Dr Evatt is accordingly concentrating on a greater allocation for the R.A.A.F. under the 73-squadron plan. It is imperative therefore that the control and direction of the R.A.A.F. should be such as to evoke the fullest support of General MacArthur in supporting our case for the provision of aircraft for the expansion and maintenance of the R.A.A.F. and in ensuring its use to the fullest operational extent." Curtin added that the United Kingdom government should even "inconvenience itself" to provide Australia with an outstanding officer, who would be invaluable not only in the present, but in the future when offensive action was taken against Japan. Curtin told Bruce that Air Marshal Drummond (Deputy Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Middle East), an Australian, would be acceptable. His name was raised again because, despite earlier (unsuccessful) negotiations, Drummond had informed Lieut-General Morshead[5] that he would welcome an opportunity of serving in Australia. Bruce pressed for Drummond but the British leaders would not agree to release him.[6] In a cable on 22nd May, Bruce mentioned several other possibilities and gave preference first to Air Chief Marshal Joubert,[7] who had just completed a term as Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Coastal Command, and then to Air Chief Marshal Longmore,[8] who was in retirement, having been removed from command in the Middle East in July 1941. Curtin consulted Blamey about Longmore, and Blamey advised that he considered that "he would be a very successful Air Officer Commanding in the circumstances obtaining in Australia". MacArthur, however, informed Curtin that it would be unwise to accept either because neither was suitable, and in the circumstances he suggested that the present arrangement, unsatisfactory though it was, should be carried on.[9]

Drakeford, meanwhile, pressed again for the removal of Bostock, but Curtin wrote to him on 11th June in the following terms:

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[5] Lt-Gen Sir Leslie Morshead, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, ED. (1st AIF: 2 Bn and CO 33 Bn 1916-19.) Comd 18 Inf Bde 1939-41; GOC 9 Div 1941-43, I Corps 1944-45. Branch manager shipping line; of Sydney; b. Ballarat, Vic, 18 Sep 1889.

[6] Drummond had already been selected to take over the post of Air Member for Training on the Air Council at Air Ministry.

[7] Air Chief Marshal Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferté, KCB, CMG, DSO. (RFC and RAF: France 1914, Egypt 1916-17, Italy 1917-18.) AOC-in-C Coastal Cd RAF 1941-43, IG of RAF 1943. Regular air force offr; b. Calcutta, India, 21 May 1887.

[8] Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, GCB, DSO. AOC-in-C RAF in ME 1940-41; IG of RAF 1941. Regular air force offr; of Wentworth, Surrey, Eng; b. St. Leonards, NSW, 8 Oct 1885.

[9] War Cabinet Agendum 107/1943 of 10 Jun.

In regard to your letter of the 1st May, relative to changes in higher command appointments in the R.A.A.F. which came under discussion with the Commander-in-Chief . . . he outlined as follows the attitude which General Kenney and himself had taken with you during your visit to Brisbane:

The appointment of R.A.A.F. officers is a matter entirely for the Commonwealth Government, but—

(*a*) General MacArthur had said that, if AVM Bostock were removed he would be given a letter of the highest commendation for the very able manner in which he had performed his duties at Allied Air Headquarters.
(*b*) The commander-in-chief would insist on the replacement of AVM Bostock by an equally able officer.
(*c*) The proposal to replace AVM Bostock by Air Commodore Hewitt was not concurred in, as the latter was not considered an adequate replacement.

In his reply on 24th June Drakeford said: "I find it difficult to reconcile General MacArthur's attitude that, while he agrees that the appointment of R.A.A.F. officers is a matter entirely for the Commonwealth Government, he 'would insist on the replacement of A.V.M. Bostock by an equally able officer', which latter condition practically amounts to an overriding right being required by the Commander-in-Chief in the selection of an officer to fill that post."

Curtin did not agree. In a letter to Drakeford on 17th July, he said: "The necessity for consultation with General MacArthur arises from his responsibility as operational commander. As such, he undoubtedly has the right to expect that he should be given an opportunity of expressing his views to the government on any change proposed in a high operational post under his command. There is no question of the exercising by him of an 'overriding right' and the responsibility of the government for appointments to high R.A.A.F. posts is not affected."

In summary, the "divided control" controversy had taken this course: War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council had decided in April 1942 to set up an R.A.A.F. organisation which divided the operational from the administrative control of the force. This arrangement was repeated during reorganisation of the Allied Air Forces in September 1942, but thereafter the Defence Committee recommended that the R.A.A.F. should be unified under one head. Mr Drakeford and the Air Board wanted Air Vice-Marshal Jones as the single commander, but MacArthur would not agree. Mr Curtin, in the position of a mediator, was not prepared to go against MacArthur's wishes, nor to force Drakeford to extend Bostock's powers. Another alternative, to bring an officer from overseas, was attempted and failed, because MacArthur was against the men nominated. No further action was taken until later in 1943 when conversations were held between Kenney, Jones and Bostock.

The R.A.A.F., therefore, had continued to be the victim of a mischievous dual control, because those responsible could not agree on a solution which would give it the unity it needed. Disputes arose over the appointment of officers, over the provision of staff for R.A.A.F. Command Headquarters, over airfield construction, training (especially advanced operational training), fighter-sector organisations, supply and



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Gurney Airfield at Milne Bay.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Boston medium bombers of No. 22 Squadron returning to a New Guinea airfield.



*(Australian War Memorial.)*

A Spitfire taking off from a Darwin airfield.



*(Australian War Memorial.)*

Spitfire pilots resting at a dispersal base at Darwin. Left to right: P-O Leonard, F-O R. W. Foster, Sqn Ldr E. M. Gibbs, F-Lt R. Norwood (all R.A.F.), and W Cdr C. R. Caldwell.

other matters. Inevitably, too, there was a conflict of loyalties among the men of the air force, tending towards the creation of groups. These troubles are inherent in such a system of dual control.

The American Air Corps had suffered from this form of divided control during the 1917-18 war; and again, in the nineteen-thirties, the U.S. Army Air establishment had two independent elements—the G.H.Q. Air Force which was responsible for combat operation and the Air Corps, responsible for supply and training. Finally, under the stress of the disturbed world conditions in the late 'thirties, the two were consolidated by a War Department directive which made both directly responsible to the Chief of the Air Corps.[1]

[1] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I (1948), p. 32.

CHAPTER 2

# THE LIMITED OFFENSIVE

BY March 1943 a renewed Japanese attempt to strengthen their hold in New Guinea by seizing Wau had failed and, with Papua and Guadalcanal secure, the chief concern of the Allies was now Rabaul, the Japanese bastion in New Britain. After Casablanca, the Combined Chiefs had directed Pacific commanders to plan advances against the enemy in accordance with their over-all directive which called for the breaking of the "Bismarcks Barrier". But General MacArthur considered that no large-scale operations could be mounted immediately because the Australian and American divisions engaged in the fighting in Papua needed rest. The Allied air forces were masters in the air, but did not yet possess a great preponderance in numbers over the Japanese army and navy air forces in the area.

In a message to General Marshall on 29th January General MacArthur had said:

It is not now immediately possible to undertake a further offensive in the SWPA. I have available or in prospect for offensive combat use, two U.S. army divisions, the 1st Marine Division, and three Australian divisions. The 32nd U.S. Division, after an exhaustive campaign, is now being withdrawn to Australia to be reconstituted and rehabilitated. The 41st U.S. Division is relieving the 32nd on the north coast of New Guinea. The infantry of the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions was used exhaustively in the Papuan campaign and is now being moved to the York Peninsula to be reconstituted. The 9th Australian Division, scheduled for return from the Middle East, will go through the same process and must be completely re-equipped. The Australian militia is not of sufficient quality for employment in the offensive. It can be used only for garrison duty. I have, therefore, no troops available at this time for offensive action.[1]

The air force as now constituted is not sufficient to support the offensive which is contemplated. With present strengths in medium and heavy bombardment it is possible to make an intense effort for only a short period of time. For the continuous execution of the proposed action, heavy and medium bomber strength must be greatly increased with corresponding increases in auxiliary echelons. A theoretical examination of the number of planes assigned to this area, taken in conjunction with recent comparative operational losses in our own and the enemy's air strength, might lead to the opinion that the present air strength would suffice. However, our experience in offensive operations over the enemy's territory at maximum ranges over water and through the most difficult tropical weather, provides ample substantiation that existing strength is capable of only a short intensive effort.

The great strength which Japan has already massed in the Rabaul area and the continuous flow of additional forces thereto, make this area a major Japanese stronghold to the defence of which she is at present subordinating all other efforts. Its capture, therefore, becomes so important a phase of the Pacific war as to involve concentration of our own forces for its accomplishment. This will require long preparation and great resources. If predominant strength is not assembled by us for the purpose, the attempt will certainly fail.

[1] It was not correct to say that the 9th Division, arriving from Egypt, must be "completely re-equipped" although some re-equipment was necessary. Moreover a considerable number of militia units had been employed successfully in offensive operations in Papua. Either MacArthur was wrongly informed on these points or else he was anxious to make out as strong a case as possible for reinforcements.

In his ELKTON plan of February 1943, which was based on the Casablanca directive, MacArthur estimated that the Allies would need 21 divisions and 1,800 aircraft to take Rabaul. The ELKTON plan proposed that forces of the South Pacific and South-West Pacific should seize and occupy areas of New Britain, New Ireland and New Guinea by a mutually supporting advance by way of the Solomon Islands to Kavieng and along the north coast of New Guinea to Wewak and the Admiralty Islands. These moves would be followed by a combined assault of both commands on Rabaul which would then be used as a main base for the staging of operations westwards along the New Guinea coast and thence north to the Philippine Islands. The plan provided for the building of airfields and aircraft-operating facilities for the support of this advance along a line linking Buna, Woodlark Island and Guadalcanal. Under cover of the air support and protection thus provided, amphibious forces would then establish forward bases from which Rabaul could be eliminated by combined attacks after the enemy had been reduced in strength by naval blockade and air bombardment. The air striking force for the operation would be composed, in the South-West Pacific Area, of the Fifth Air Force and the R.A.A.F. and, in the South Pacific Area, of the Thirteenth Air Force and R.N.Z.A.F. and the American naval air forces. MacArthur believed that local air mastery over the battle area was vital and that any attempt to advance into territory where air advantage rested with the enemy could not succeed.

In March the American Joint Chiefs of Staff called a military conference in Washington to decide what operations could be carried out in 1943 in the Pacific theatre. To this conference MacArthur sent General Kenney; Major-General Sutherland, his Chief of Staff; and Brigadier-General Chamberlin, his senior operations officer. At the opening of the conference, on 21st March, Admiral King told representatives of the South Pacific, Central Pacific and South-West Pacific commands that the military projects in the Mediterranean in 1943 might mean a further delay in reinforcements for the Pacific battle areas. A much greater share of aircraft production had been given to the Mediterranean and United Kingdom areas. Much of the discussion which followed at the conference hinged on the question of the forces which could be spared for the Pacific. It was clear that the forces needed for the capture of Rabaul and the preliminary operations leading up to it far exceeded what could be shipped to the area. A committee was then appointed to re-examine the operational plans prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and MacArthur to see whether smaller forces would suffice for the accomplishment of the tasks, but it decided that reductions could not be made. There was therefore no alternative to postponing the capture of Rabaul, and on 29th March the Joint Chiefs of Staff issued new orders for 1943 to the South-West Pacific and South Pacific commanders. These deleted the capture of Rabaul and called for:

1. The establishment of airfields on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands.

2. The seizure of Lae-Salamaua-Finschhafen-Madang area and seizure and occupation of western New Britain.
3. The seizure and occupation of the Solomon Islands to include the southern portion of Bougainville.

To ensure cooperation between the South Pacific and South-West Pacific Area, the directive provided that these operations were to be carried out under the general direction of General MacArthur. With his immediate objectives now before him, MacArthur went ahead with the planning of his campaign, in consultation with Admiral Halsey (the commander of the South Pacific Area) who flew to Brisbane from Noumea for talks in the final stages of the planning.

As an early step it was decided to bring Rabaul under heavy attack from the air. This would necessitate first, improving airfields and bases already in Allied possession; second, occupying and developing additional air bases which could be obtained without having to use large forces; and third, seizing and developing airfields held by the enemy. Aircraft were to be used to gain air mastery over each enemy objective along the two axes of the advance towards Rabaul, while other aircraft struck at other enemy air bases and destroyed enemy naval forces and shipping within reach of their bases. Allied forces would then prevent the reinforcement or supply of the enemy objective under attack; land forces would be moved forward under the protection of air and naval forces to seize the objective, and then aircraft would be flown on to the captured airfields. This process was to be repeated to successive objectives and the entire movement would be protected by air attacks on Japanese air and sea bases along the general line linking Buka, Rabaul, Kavieng and Wewak so that supplies and reinforcements could not easily reach the Japanese forces under attack.

Mr Churchill and President Roosevelt met again in May, this time in Washington, and the meeting was a signal for a renewal of requests by Mr Curtin and General MacArthur for the allocation of greater forces to the Pacific. Curtin informed MacArthur that the meeting was to take place and asked him whether he would like to take the opportunity of putting the case for the South-West Pacific Area again. MacArthur considered, however, that the Pacific theatre would not be discussed except in a minor way and that there was "not the slightest chance of changing the basic decisions which had made this a secondary area". In a speech to the United States Congress on 19th May Churchill gave an undertaking that Britain would wage war in the Pacific side by side with the United States in accordance with the best strategic employment of forces. "The air war," he said, "is a major factor in the process of victory. It is agreed that we should at the earliest moment bring our joint air power to bear on military targets and the homeland of Japan."

The Washington conference approved an outline plan for the advance on Japan. This plan called on the commanders in the Pacific, Burma and China to accomplish the following aims in 1943-44:

1. Augment supplies to China via Burma.
2. Conduct air warfare in and from China.
3. Eject the Japanese from the Aleutians.
4. Seize the Marshall and Caroline Islands.
5. Conquer the Solomons, the Bismarck Archipelago and the Japanese-held parts of New Guinea.
6. Intensify activities against enemy lines of communication.

With due regard to the requirements of the main effort of the war against the European enemies, the strategy was that Japanese forces must be worn down and subjected to continuous and increasing attacks so as to prevent them strengthening their hold, and that the Allied forces must obtain positions in readiness for full-scale attacks when these could be undertaken. These decisions meant that the grand strategy of beating the enemy in Europe first, while holding the Japanese at bay in the Pacific, had been modified to some extent. The Washington conference was therefore a turning point in Pacific strategy. Confidence was now so great that the Allied Powers felt that a limited offensive could be undertaken against Japan so that, when the time came for the movement of all the fighting forces to the Pacific, the Japanese could be speedily forced to surrender. In some measure this decision was a success for those who had so strongly criticised the "beat Hitler first" policy, and Curtin and MacArthur were prominent among them.

While the future offensive was being planned hard fighting was in progress in New Guinea in the tangled mountain area between Wau and Salamaua.

Of the seven Australian squadrons in New Guinea under Air Commodore Hewitt (No. 9 Group), four were at Milne Bay and three at Port Moresby. The seven squadrons were:

MILNE BAY

No. 6 (Squadron Leader Leer[2]), reconnaissance and strike, equipped with Hudsons.
No. 75 (Squadron Leader Arthur), fighters, equipped with Kittyhawks.
No. 77 (Squadron Leader Cresswell), fighters, equipped with Kittyhawks.
No. 100 (Squadron Leader Hepburn[3]), reconnaissance and torpedo bombers, equipped with Beauforts.

PORT MORESBY

No. 4 (Squadron Leader Allshorn), army cooperation, equipped with Wirraways.
No. 22 (Squadron Leader K. M. Hampshire), light bombers, equipped with Bostons.
No. 30 (Wing Commander Walker), long-range fighters, equipped with Beaufighters.

The three squadrons at Port Moresby were within easy reach of the ground fighting around Mubo and were used mainly in support of the Australian army in those operations. The fighter squadrons at Milne Bay

[2] W Cdr W. G. Leer, DFC, AFC, 173. Comd 6 SFTS 1941-42; 7 and 32 Sqns; comd 6 Sqn and 74 Wing 1943, 3 AOS 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Haberfield, NSW; b. Sydney, 18 Jun 1917.

[3] W Cdr J. A. Hepburn, DFC, AFC, 247. 12, 13, 2 and 7 Sqns; comd 100 Sqn 1943. Regular air force offr; of Warrnambool, Vic; b. Brighton, Vic, 24 Jan 1919.

gave that important Allied air and shipping base protection from raiding enemy aircraft. The Hudsons of No. 6 Squadron and the Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron were used mainly for reconnaissance over the Solomon Sea, and for attacks on enemy shipping within their range and occasionally on targets in the Huon Gulf and western New Britain.

When formed in 1942, No. 9 Group had only operational control of the squadrons in New Guinea, administrative control being exercised by North-Eastern Area, with headquarters at Townsville, Queensland. However, on 1st January 1943, No. 9 Group became a separate command and Hewitt had complete operational and administrative control of it. In February 1943, Air Force Headquarters issued orders setting up two subordinate wing headquarters within the group: No. 71 at Milne Bay and No. 73 at Port Moresby.

No. 9 Group in early 1943 was faced with a constant deficiency in personnel. It was found difficult to obtain men to replace those who had served in the tropics for their tour of fifteen months, to form new units badly needed within the group, and to fill deficiencies which existed in almost all units. In March 1943, the deficiency for the whole group was 1,072; by April it had increased to 1,575; by May to 1,695; and by June to 2,005. In these four months the total establishment of the force grew from 9,545 to 12,636 and the total strength from 8,473 to 10,631. Of the men sent up from Australia about 50 per cent were used as replacements for time-expired men, so that the actual increase in strength against deficiencies was small. The deficiency was spread out over most musterings but it was possible to carry on without serious impairment of the group's efficiency.

Milne Bay was perhaps one of the wettest and most humid places on the island. At the airfields flies, mosquitoes, millepedes, spiders and other insects made life miserable. The food available was not always palatable. From January to August 1943 the members of No. 100 Squadron lived on beans, tinned salmon and bacon, bully beef and asparagus. There was no fresh food except what could be bought from the crews of American transports or from the natives. There was a shortage of clothing. Regulations demanded the wearing of long-sleeved shirts and long trousers as protection against malarial mosquitoes. However, there were not enough long trousers to go round, so a large number of men had to wear shorts.[4] A group of Intelligence officers working in one isolated place had to obtain replacements of boots from a salvage dump on which the boots of dead Australians and Americans had been thrown.[5]

Along the jungle trails between Wau and Mubo the 3rd Australian Division was engaged in a grim struggle in conditions of great difficulty. It was a nerve-wracking operation in jungle-clad valleys and steep ridges. Nearly all ammunition, food and equipment had to be shouldered by native carriers from Wau airfield, where transport aircraft arrived daily

[4] Gp Capt C. S. Wiggins, Report on Conditions of Radar Stations in New Guinea.
[5] F-Lt W. J. Heyting, Report on Visit to Port Moresby and Buna Jan 1943.

with their cargoes from Port Moresby. The Australian and American squadrons, commanded by General Whitehead, gave assistance by bombing and strafing, although the value of these activities was limited by the difficulty of seeing the enemy from the air.

The Japanese aim in New Guinea at this time was to reinforce the bases at Lae, Salamaua, Madang and Wewak and to secure the region north of the Owen Stanley Range with the ultimate object of preparing for operations in the Port Moresby area.[6] The *51st Division* was deployed in the Lae-Salamaua area, the *20th Division* at Madang and the *41st Division* at Wewak. The *20th Division* was to advance through the Ramu and Markham Valleys to Lae and would be replaced at Madang by the *41st*. Attention was to be given to establishing land and sea routes linking the Lae-Salamaua region with Madang and Rabaul.[7]

After the destruction of their Bismarck Sea convoy in March the Japanese sent in reinforcements and supplies by barge. Continuous barge traffic was observed along the north coast of New Guinea from Madang to Finschhafen. Allied air attacks forced the enemy to confine these movements to hours of darkness.

The *51st Japanese Division* had been decisively defeated at Wau and had withdrawn its forward elements to Mubo village, which was an important outpost controlling the good track which goes to Komiatum and thence to Salamaua. Mubo is surrounded by hills and ridges, possession of which meant possession of Mubo, and the fighting centred on gaining control of these features.

Thus, on 26th April, seven Boston bombers of No. 22 Squadron operating from Ward's airfield, Port Moresby, and led by Hampshire, made an attack with bombs and machine-gun fire on a feature called the "Pimple" near Mubo. The air support was asked for after the 2/7th Battalion had failed to take the feature which was perched on a spur leading from Green Hill.

Because the country was covered by thick jungle, it was necessary for the infantry to direct the Bostons to the target by firing smoke shells on to it from a mountain gun. The Bostons bombed accurately, and the first three aircraft, led by Flight Lieutenant Sladen, made thirteen strafing runs across the area, followed by the remaining four led by Hampshire. It was expected that many casualties would be inflicted on the Japanese defenders, but they had been warned of the impending attacks and, when the Bostons appeared, they withdrew to the north of the Pimple. By the time a company of the 2/7th had moved forward to occupy the enemy's position after the attack, however, they found that the Japanese had returned again in force. The 2/7th Battalion reported later that this form of direct aid to attacking infantry was not successful and considered artillery support more satisfactory. For their own safety troops had to

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[6] General Imamura, commander of the *Eighth Area Army* at Rabaul, was opposed to continuing with the forlorn hope of taking Port Moresby but he was overruled by Imperial Headquarters. (S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol VI, p. 136.)

[7] Lt-Col Tanaka, staff officer of the *XVIII Army* (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

withdraw too far from the enemy during the bombing, and the time taken to move forward again through mountainous jungle country allowed the enemy time to recover from the air attacks and get ready to resist the ground assault on his defences.

Hampshire led another six Bostons against the same target four days later, and, after dropping bombs, the Bostons made twenty-five strafing runs. Again army smoke signals were used to mark the enemy positions but the crews were unable to see whether their efforts were successful. In the first two days of May the Bostons made another ninety-seven runs over the enemy troops on the Pimple. Meanwhile, the Japanese had withstood four determined assaults by the 2/7th Battalion, and the constant air attack seemed to make little impression. On 9th May the Japanese countered by surrounding a company of the 2/7th, and on the following day made a vigorous bid to overwhelm it. They were thrown back, however, and forced to withdraw to their strong defences on the Pimple.

Progress was slow in the drive towards Salamaua, but there was no need for urgency. The taking of Salamaua was not regarded as being of any great value in itself, but pressure towards it was important as a means of drawing Japanese forces away from Lae, which the Allies were now planning to capture as part of the general advance towards Rabaul. Thus it was important that Salamaua should not fall before the Lae operation began. The Japanese were sending men forward from Lae to the front at Mubo thereby weakening the defence of Lae. However, campaigning in unhealthy and fatiguing conditions was sapping the strength of the Australian troops.

No. 22 Squadron which, with No. 4 Army Cooperation Squadron, carried the main burden of aiding the army on the Salamaua trail, attacked the Francisco River and Nassau Bay areas during May. On 23rd May four Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Eddison,[8] joined with five Bostons to attack Nassau Bay and the Duali area. The Bostons dropped bombs in and round villages while the Beaufighters fired 500 cannon and 20,000 machine-gun rounds into the villages on the bay.

The Bostons and Beaufighters of these two Australian squadrons had also extended their attacks to Japanese bases behind the battle areas. On 9th May eight Beaufighters joined ten Mitchell bombers of the Fifth Air Force on a raid to Madang where they were to attack Japanese aircraft on the airfield with cannon fire. The squadrons made a rendezvous over Saidor, which was occupied by the enemy, and, as a result of this, the enemy defences were alert when the aircraft arrived over their target. The Japanese fired heavily with anti-aircraft guns, and, just as the Beaufighters attacked the airfield, ten enemy fighter aircraft intercepted them, damaging Flying Officer Nicholson's[9] machine. A squadron of American

[8] F-Lt E. D. Eddison, 563; 30 Sqn. Grazier; of Canberra; b. Southampton, Hants, Eng, 5 Apr 1918. Killed in action 27 May 1943.

[9] F-Lt K. G. Nicholson, 415044; 30 and 85 Sqns. Plumber; of Northam, WA; b. Northam, 31 Aug 1922.

fighter planes had been ordered to protect the Beaufighters and Mitchells but did not appear. The Beaufighters therefore completed one attack on the airfield and then attacked a large ship crowded with enemy troops. The Japanese fighter planes pursued the Beaufighters as far as Saidor on the way back to Moresby but were outdistanced at a speed of between 275 and 300 miles per hour.

On 24th May the Bostons carried out an early-morning raid on a wrecked ship on the beach near Lae, which, it was suspected, the Japanese were using to store supplies and unload submarines. Five aircraft, again led by Hampshire, took part in the mission, and just before dawn broke the aircraft made a gliding approach on the target, passing over the wreck from bow to stern. The Bostons attacked in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire and some of the bombs exploded on the wreck which caught fire. One of the Bostons, piloted by Flying Officer Rowell[1] with Sergeant Taylor[2] (gunner) and Sergeant Duncan[3] (wireless operator) as his crew, did not see the target on the first run. Rowell decided to attack again alone and a searchlight from the ground illuminated his aircraft as he approached the target at 250 feet. Anti-aircraft weapons then opened fire heavily on him, killing Taylor, severely wounding Duncan and damaging the aircraft, but Rowell, by skilful handling, managed to fly it back to base.

Three days later the Beaufighters accompanied by American Mitchell and Liberator bombers attacked Lae Airfield and Jacobsen's Plantation where they were met by the Japanese with intense anti-aircraft fire from medium and light-calibre weapons. Eddison's aircraft was leading the Beaufighters across the airfield when it was hit and crashed in flames at the north-east end, killing Eddison and his navigator, Sergeant Allott.[4] The enemy anti-aircraft barrage on that day was the most intense experienced for some time.

The enemy air force had not been idle while their ground positions round Mubo and their rear bases were being pounded by the Allied squadrons. On 17th and 18th May and 6th June large formations of bombers and fighters bombarded the Wau airfield where some casualties and damage were inflicted. In the last two weeks of June they turned their attention to the Mubo area where ground fighting had again flared up. On 20th June Wau was bombed again from the air and at 10.20 a.m. next day one Japanese aircraft dropped bombs on Guadagasal Ridge near Mubo. This was followed immediately by the bombing and strafing of near-by Mat Mat Hill. In the afternoon bombers again attacked Guadagasal, using dive and pattern-bombing tactics. Casualties were inflicted on ground forces and one bomber made a direct hit on the ammunition dump at Guadagasal. Japanese on the ground in the Mubo Valley had

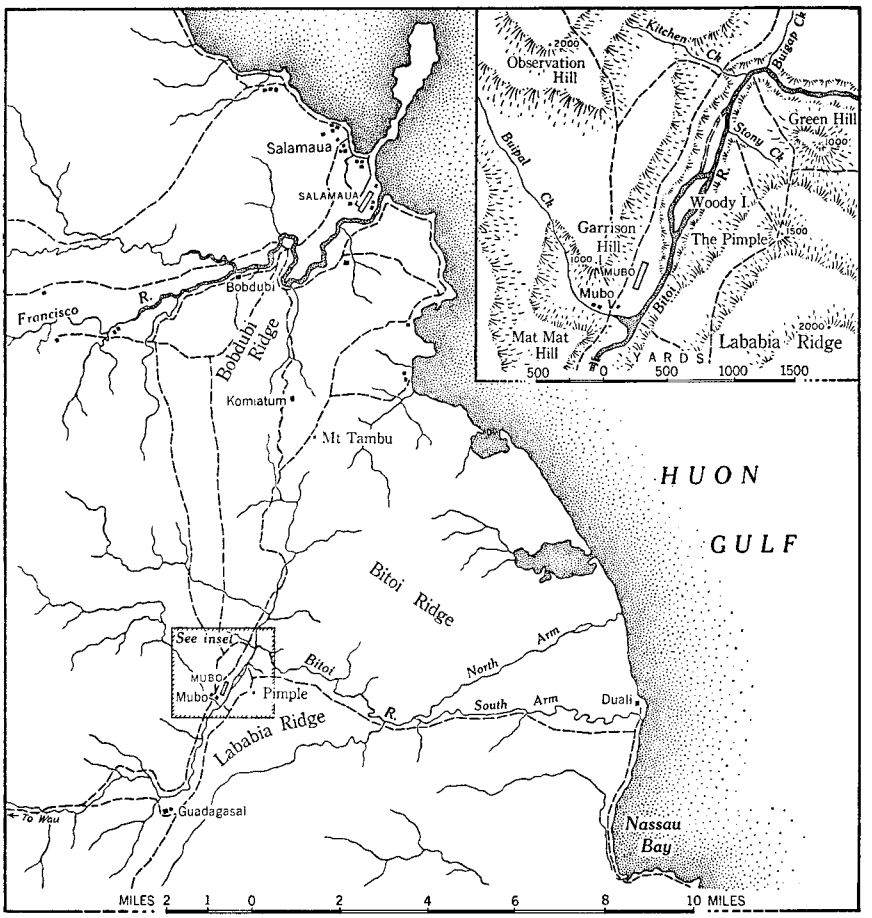
[1] F-Lt H. M. Rowell, 406958; 22 Sqn. Clerk; of Victoria Park, WA; b. Victoria Park, 31 Dec 1920.

[2] Sgt A. C. Taylor, 413914; 22 Sqn. Mechanical engineer; of Belmore, NSW; b. Campsie, NSW, 28 Jul 1922. Killed in action 24 May 1943.

[3] F-Sgt D. O. Duncan, 401641; 22 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Melbourne, 1 Jan 1914.

[4] Sgt R. M. Allott, 11321; 30 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Benalla, Vic; b. Albury, NSW, 29 Sep 1921. Killed in action 27 May 1943.

been seen signalling to the aircraft with red and white flags, and during the day a total of 83 enemy aircraft were over the area, although only about 45 attacked. Nevertheless, the Japanese troops were greatly heartened by this display.




By coincidence, on this day, 21st June, six Bostons of No. 22 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Craig,[5] came over to attack Japanese targets in the same area. The Bostons completed their task of bombing and machine-gunning in the Kitchen Creek and Stony Creek areas without being interfered with by the Japanese aircraft which were intent on carrying out their own tasks. American Lightning fighters were at the time patrolling over Wau and the Bostons sent a radio message informing them

[5] F-Lt H. B. Craig, DFC, 402228. 1451 and 1457 Flights RAF; 22 Sqn. Jackeroo; of Woollahra, NSW; b. Sydney, 3 Oct 1914.

of the presence of the Japanese. The Lightnings immediately flew into the area and claimed the destruction of nine Japanese aircraft.

The enemy had been reinforcing his battalions in the Mubo garrison and the following day launched a full-scale two-battalion attack on Lababia Ridge.[6] The attack included charges with fixed bayonets and in the early stages of the action Japanese soldiers reached within ten yards of the Australian weapon pits. The Japanese continued their assaults on the following day, but were defeated and eventually retired after losing about 170 killed and wounded.[7] The Australians had 11 men killed and 11 wounded.

Except when the weather prevented flying, the Bostons maintained their attacks on the ridges; and from time to time they dropped newspapers, magazines, tobacco and fresh bread to the forward troops. The native carrier line to the forward troops was greatly overtaxed and the army, faced with a difficult supply problem, used Wirraway aircraft of No. 4 Squadron to carry ammunition, clothing and rations, medical supplies, signal wire, 3-inch mortars and Vickers machine-guns; mails, however, were dropped only when their recovery on the ground was assured. Some inexperienced pilots on dropping missions approached the dropping ground too high and too fast, with the result that recovery was greatly reduced. It was also found necessary to limit loads to 400 pounds, because of the small runway at Wau airfield. No. 4 Squadron was performing a variety of important tasks. It provided aircraft for artillery spotting, photographic reconnaissance, tactical reconnaissance and flare-dropping. Message-dropping by Wirraways proved to be of great value.

In May General MacArthur and General Blamey decided to seize Nassau Bay near Salamaua thirty days before the planned assault on Lae and the Markham River Valley. Blamey directed the American "MacKechnie Force", which comprised the I/162nd Battalion[8] of the 41st American Division, to carry out this task, and on 30th June, in darkness, the Americans landed at Nassau Bay, where an Australian patrol was in position. The converging of the 17th Australian Brigade, the 15th Brigade, and MacKechnie Force on Salamaua, deceived the Japanese into believing that to be the probable main objective in the area.

Meanwhile, the Fifth Air Force bombers were switched from other targets, and support of the ground forces in the Mubo-Salamaua area became their chief concern. On 7th July squadrons of Liberator and Mitchell bombers accompanied Bostons of No. 22 in heavy attacks in the area. Squadron Leader Learmonth, who had taken over command of the squadron from Hampshire (posted for duty in the United Kingdom), led seven Bostons in a morning attack on Observation Hill which was strafed with machine-gun fire. This target was also attacked by nine American Mitchells. In the afternoon six Boston crews from No. 22, four of whom

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[6] The *I* and *II Bns* of *66 Inf Regt*, a total of 1,256 men against 150 of 2/6 Bn AIF.

[7] Colonel Araki of *66 Inf Regt* later admitted 41 killed and 131 wounded.

[8] The 1st Battalion of 162nd Infantry Regiment.

had taken part in the morning raid, bombed and then machine-gunned Bobdubi Ridge. The crews could clearly see enemy slit trenches and weapon pits. The Bostons attacked again next day and on 10th July bombed troops and stores in the Komiatum area. The Japanese retaliated by flying some fifty sorties to the area but achieved little.

The American force at Nassau Bay moved slowly inland to the rear of the Japanese positions at Mubo, and on 12th July linked with the 17th Brigade. The enemy garrison at Mubo was now cut off, and on 14th July the Australian forces captured the village. The Australian and American ground forces now began the advance towards Komiatum and Mount Tambu and beyond to Salamaua. In the week 9th-16th July nearly all available aircraft of the Fifth Air Force were attacking the Japanese garrison. The tonnage of bombs dropped was raised in July to a total of 1,238 compared with 119 in June, and total missions flown were 115 compared with 38 in June.

The Australian-made Boomerang aircraft, with which No. 4 Squadron was now being equipped, began to take part in the operations at this stage. The pilots were frequently challenged by Allied anti-aircraft gunners because the Boomerangs had characteristics of speed and shape new to known Allied aircraft in the South-West Pacific. This misunderstanding of the new aircraft led to the loss of an Australian on 5th July when a Boomerang was returning to base after carrying out a reconnaissance in the Salamaua area. The aircraft passed over Nassau Bay which had been heavily raided earlier that day by Japanese aircraft. American gunners, anticipating another enemy raid, immediately opened fire with light anti-aircraft weapons. The plane was hit and crashed, killing the pilot and destroying the aircraft.

The ground troops in the Mubo operations considered that the best results in air support operations were obtained in harassing attacks on enemy bases and dumps and the disruption of his supply lines. Bombing in close support of the ground troops in heavy jungle country was difficult, and unless the targets were completely saturated by heavy bombing, the effect on enemy machine-gun posts and weapon pits was not great. Major-General Savige,[9] commander of the 3rd Division, reported to New Guinea Force that response to requests for air support was slow. He said: "Until an air support tentacle with the necessary communications is established in forward areas quick support is not possible. Even so, with all communications working at ideal speed, owing to the distance which the support aircraft have to come (Moresby or Dobodura) from airfield to target area, a minimum of two hours would elapse from time of request to time over target, during which time the situation will have changed."

However, Japanese leaders, after the war, considered that Allied air attacks in the Lae-Salamaua campaign were effective. General Adachi,

[9] Lt-Gen Sir Stanley Savige, KBE, CB, DSO, MC, ED. (1915-19: 24 Bn AIF and Dunsterforce.) Comd 17 Bde 1939-41; GOC 3 Div 1942-44, I Corps and NG Force 1944, II Corps 1944-45. Company director; of Melbourne; b. Morwell, Vic, 26 Jun 1890. Died 15 May 1954.

commander of the *XVIII Army,* and a number of other senior officers[1] signed a joint statement which read: "Troops were pinned down during daylight hours in air-raid shelters; there was insufficient ground to allow the dispersal of troops over a large area and therefore casualties were heavy. At Salamaua the casualties from air raids were 150. The headquarters of the *51st Division* (at Salamaua) had to be moved after receiving a direct hit. At this time Adachi was visiting the headquarters but was in a shelter. The most efficient phase of the Allied campaign was considered to be the cooperation between Allied air and ground forces."

On the 7th May General MacArthur had ordered the forces of the South Pacific to occupy New Georgia in the Solomons. While Admiral Halsey made preparations for the invasion of New Georgia, the Japanese were strengthening their defences there, building airfields at Munda, and on near-by Kolombangara Island. Halsey's aircraft repeatedly bombed enemy airfields and naval vessels in the Solomons in preparation for his advance. On the nights of the 5th-6th March and 12th-13th May the airfields on Kolombangara and New Georgia were attacked simultaneously. It was found, however, that attacks on airfields rarely put them out of commission for more than a day or two. Japanese air attacks were also frequent and heavy.

On 7th June the Japanese air commanders began an air assault against Guadalcanal with large forces of fighters and bombers. This assault culminated in a raid by an estimated 120 enemy aircraft on 16th June. They were met by 104 Allied aircraft which claimed 81 enemy for the loss of 6 Allied planes.[2]

The Americans increased the intensity of their air and naval attacks as the day set for the landing approached. Before dawn on 30th June American forces made landings on New Georgia. Japanese ground resistance was slight but the following day strong formations of enemy aircraft attempted to disrupt the operations at the beachhead. Two sharp naval actions, fought in Kula Gulf following the landing, were costly both to the American and Japanese forces engaged. Ground forces slowly pushed towards Munda, while aircraft delivered bombing attacks. During one of these air raids on 25th July 186 tons of bombs were dropped on Munda and the airfield was captured on 5th August. The campaign ended on 24th August with the occupation of Bairoko harbour.

Meanwhile, the Australian and American squadrons in New Guinea, operating from airfields in the Buna area (notably Dobodura), Port Moresby and Milne Bay, were attacking the enemy in the Lae-Salamaua, western New Britain and Rabaul areas with increasing momentum. Engineers had rushed ahead with the preparation of airfields on the

[1] The other officers were Lt-Gen Kato, chief of staff, *Eighth Area Army,* Rabaul; Lt-Col Tanaka, staff officer, *XVIII Army*; Lt-Col Ota, staff officer *Eighth Area Army*; and Naval Captain Sanagi, senior staff officer, *South-East Fleet.*

[2] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II,* Vol IV (1950), p. 218.

Dobodura plains, and this brought both Rabaul and Wewak, an important enemy base in northern New Guinea, within effective range of Mitchell bomber aircraft. The elements of the "First Air Task Force" were concentrating at Dobodura and the neutralisation of Rabaul became the main target both for American heavy and medium bombers.

The Fifth Air Force directed the R.A.A.F's No. 9 Group to attack enemy bases in New Britain and, in order to make this task easier, Goodenough Island was to be prepared as an advanced operating base with two independent landing fields, one for fighters and the other capable of use by heavy bombers. Goodenough is a mountainous island just north of the Papuan coast, and, although only about 16 miles in diameter, it rises to a height of 8,600 feet in the centre. At this time an Australian infantry battalion garrisoned it and two R.A.A.F. radar stations, which had been furnishing information about enemy air movements, were operating there. Two R.A.A.F. mobile works squadrons were sent to the island to prepare the required airfields and by the end of April a temporary landing field was ready for use. A sawmill was established, camps were built and a road was made from the docks to the new Vivigani airfield.

On 17th May the Vivigani airfield was used for the first time for a mission against the enemy, when six Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Parsons,[3] landed there from Gurney airfield (Milne Bay) in the afternoon and took off again at 11.15 p.m. for a night attack on the Gasmata airfields and supply dumps. The attack was successful and was repeated two days later when eight Beauforts led by Squadron Leader Smibert, again attacked Gasmata, dropping twelve tons of general purpose and incendiary bombs in the target area. One of the Beauforts (captained by Flying Officer Forrest) failed to return. The following day seven Beauforts with fighter cover provided by eight Kittyhawks of No. 77 Squadron, led by Cresswell, searched without success for the missing Beaufort. The Beauforts were ordered out on two more strikes against Gasmata before the end of May but on the first, 28th May, bad weather completely obscured the target and on 31st May only one Beaufort, piloted by Flight Sergeant Green,[4] found Gasmata through the heavy cloud. Green attacked but could not see the result of his efforts.

After the heavy enemy air raids on Port Moresby and Milne Bay in mid-April Japanese air activity in New Guinea had tapered off. On 10th May two enemy aircraft dropped bombs at the shipping anchorage at Milne Bay and during the week 15th-21st May seventeen attacks were made, including two large-scale attacks on Wau (already referred to), five small attacks on Dobodura, three on Port Moresby and one on Milne Bay. Allied shipping was also attacked in Port Harvey, Oro Bay and Douglas Harbour where a ship was sunk and another damaged. Warnings received at Milne Bay of the approach of enemy aircraft sent Kittyhawk fighters of Nos. 75 and 77 Squadrons into the air during May and June

[3] Sqn Ldr L. E. H. Parsons, DFC, 250826. 100, 8 and 7 Sqns. Draftsman; of Hobart; b. Burnie, Tas, 20 Nov 1920.

[4] F-Lt C. R. Green, CGM, 416212. 100 and 8 Sqns. Student; of Lenswood, SA; b. Forest Range, SA, 23 Apr 1918.

but no air battles ensued, either because the enemy aircraft could not be found, or because the expected attacks did not develop. With little else to be done the Kittyhawks were used to escort transport aircraft which were flying men and supplies to Goodenough, or on reconnaissance missions. When not engaged in these tasks they carried out training exercises and flying tests.

MacArthur had assigned to the Sixth American Army the task of occupying Woodlark and Kiriwina Islands, to provide air bases to cover later stages of the ELKTON operations. As they were not defended by the Japanese they could be occupied without committing large ground forces. The landings were to be made simultaneously with the landings at Nassau Bay and New Georgia, mentioned above. The Fifth Air Force and the Australian squadrons in New Guinea were to aid the operations by providing fighter protection, air support to ground troops and weather forecasting.

A squadron of Spitfire fighters (No. 79) which had just been formed on the Australian mainland and two squadrons of Kittyhawks (Nos. 76 and 77 Squadrons) were ordered to proceed to Goodenough, while Hudsons, another Kittyhawk squadron (No. 75) and Beauforts of the R.A.A.F., operating from Milne Bay, were to provide anti-submarine patrols and protection from enemy aircraft for Allied shipping convoys carrying the assault forces. During the early stages of the operation the bombing of the enemy base at Rabaul was to be the principal objective of the Allied air forces. This target was highly important because the Japanese were expected to use aircraft to attack Milne Bay, Goodenough, Kiriwina and Woodlark in strength as soon as they became aware of Allied intentions. MacArthur believed that it would not be possible to carry out the occupation without the enemy discovering it in the early stages. As soon as Woodlark and Kiriwina were firmly established as bases General Kenney was to bring in elements of his air forces and prepare these for general support of the Lae-Salamaua, Finschhafen, Madang and western New Britain operations.

Late in May the advance party of No. 77 Squadron arrived at Goodenough and by 15th June it was ready to take part in the operation. The following day No. 76 Squadron (commanded by Squadron Leader Perrin[5]) and No. 79 (commanded by Squadron Leader Rawlinson[6]) arrived. By 15th June Hewitt had established the headquarters of No. 9 Group at Milne Bay and No. 73 Wing headquarters, commanded by Group Captain McLachlan,[7] was set up at Goodenough to control the three R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons based at Vivigani airfield.

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[5] Gp Capt J. R. Perrin, DFC, 380. 3 Sqn; comd 5 and 24 Sqns 1942, 76 Sqn 1943; SASO Overseas HQ 1944-46. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. Melbourne, 9 Oct 1916.

[6] Gp Capt A. C. Rawlinson, DFC, 386. Comd 3 Sqn 1941, 79 Sqn 1943, 78 Wing 1945. Regular air force offr; of Ivanhoe, Vic; b. Fremantle, WA, 31 Jul 1918.

[7] Air Cmdre I. D. McLachlan, DFC, 55. Comd 3 Sqn 1940-41, RAAF Stns Canberra and Laverton 1942, 73 Wing 1943, Southern Area 1944, 81 Wing 1945. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. South Yarra, Vic, 23 Jul 1911.

Apart from air support to the army in the Mubo area, the preliminary moves in MacArthur's 1943 offensive resulted in little direct contact with the enemy for the Australian squadrons during June and early July. No. 6 Squadron, equipped with Hudson aircraft (the efficiency of which was reduced by age and tropical conditions), carried out an almost daily search of the sea lanes into Milne Bay for enemy submarines and escorted the many shipping convoys that entered and left Milne Bay in this busy period. They were aided in their task by Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron and a number of Beaufort crews from No. 7 Squadron. During a reconnaissance patrol, Flying Officer Seymour,[8] flying a Beaufort of No. 100 Squadron, discovered a small convoy of enemy vessels west of Bougainville on 25th June. He attacked one of the vessels but the bombs struck the water sixty yards from the target.

Small parties of ground troops landed at Woodlark Island on 23rd June and at Kiriwina on 24th June. They immediately began preparing for the arrival of the main parties on 30th June. The enemy did not oppose the landings and the R.A.A.F. squadrons, which were held constantly ready to meet the expected enemy air attacks, were not called on. Because of the strategic importance of the islands violent attempts by enemy aircraft and naval vessels to oppose the landings, even involving the sacrifice of suicide landing parties, were expected. But nothing happened. It was a great surprise to the eager fighter pilots who stood daily in readiness by their aircraft, that, during the entire period of the operation, enemy reaction was limited to reconnaissance and two small bombing raids on Woodlark. Most of the enemy's air activity in July was concentrated against Halsey's force in the Solomons and against the squadrons in the Darwin area. Nevertheless, General Krueger, commanding the Sixth Army, commended No. 9 Group for its efficient support of the operation. "Plans for air reconnaissance and air coverage were faithfully executed," he said.

During one of these reconnaissance missions on 12th July a Beaufort from No. 100 Squadron failed to return. Search missions were ordered but the crew was not found. It was learned later that the Beaufort had been shot down south of St George's Channel, between New Britain and New Ireland, by an American Liberator bomber of the South Pacific Command which mistook it for an enemy aircraft. When the Beaufort crashed the Americans realised it was an Australian aircraft and dropped a raft, food and flares to the crew whom they saw struggling in the water. No trace of the crew was found later although 250 flying hours were expended searching for them. On 20th July, during another of these patrols, a Beaufort, piloted by Flying Officer Anderson,[9] discovered an enemy naval force of three cruisers and five destroyers south of Cape St George. The Beaufort was immediately attacked by four Japanese

[8] F-Lt R. Seymour, 406879; 100 Sqn. Draftsman; of Mt Lawley, WA; b. Perth, WA, 10 Aug 1920.

[9] F-O R. B. Anderson, 409070; 100 Sqn. Farmer; of Boneo, Vic; b. Caulfield, Vic, 19 Aug 1914. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.




Eastern New Guinea, New Britain and the Solomons.

Zero fighters which were protecting the naval vessels. Sergeant McMahon,[1] the turret gunner, opened fire with long and short bursts and saw bullets striking one of the Zeros. Its pilot then broke off the engagement and Anderson flew in and out of the clouds for twenty minutes fighting off the three remaining Zeros before escaping. The Beaufort was damaged in the fight with bullet holes in petrol tanks, mainplane and engine nacelles and it had a punctured tyre. Nevertheless Anderson made a successful landing at his base.

By the end of July the R.A.A.F. strength in New Guinea, fed by the inflow of trained men from the mainland, had grown considerably. No. 9 Group now controlled four wings (two operational, one works, and one radio location). It had nine operational squadrons and a torpedo-bomber detachment, one transport squadron, one rescue-and-communication unit, three fighter sectors, four operational base units, two medical receiving stations, one air ambulance detachment, eleven wireless stations, and seven works units. On Goodenough Island alone its strength was 3,614 men.

Towards the end of July, after months of movement and preparation, the Australian squadrons began to carry out their primary bombing mission of the offensive, which was to attack bases in New Britain and the enemy vessels which moved along the New Britain coastline en route to New Guinea. The Japanese were reinforcing Rabaul from Truk and from Rabaul men and arms were trans-shipped by cargo vessels, barges, destroyers and submarines to bases at Gasmata, Cape Gloucester and Cape Hoskins. It was No. 9 Group's task to destroy these bases and the enemy communications leading to them.

After a preliminary reconnaissance of Gasmata airfield, carried out on 20th July by Beaufighters, led by Wing Commander Glasscock, and protected by twelve Kittyhawks of No. 77 Squadron, Hewitt on 22nd July ordered five of his squadrons out on the biggest mission by Australian aircraft up to that time. The reconnaissance had shown that the airfield was serviceable. In poor weather ten Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron, fourteen Kittyhawks from No. 77, the full strength of twenty-four Kittyhawks from No. 75 (flown from Milne Bay to Goodenough on 21st July to take part), six Bostons of No. 22 and eight Beaufighters of No. 30, totalling sixty-two aircraft, took part in this mission. Two other squadrons, Nos. 79 and 76, were standing by to protect the base at Goodenough so that seven Australian squadrons were directly or indirectly engaged. The Kittyhawks of No. 77 Squadron each carried six 40-lb. bombs with the intention of carrying out low-level bombing and strafing after the bombers had finished with the target, but they encountered heavy rain and cloud and were unable to reach Gasmata.

The Bostons of No. 22, which had been withdrawn from support of the army at Mubo, had moved from Port Moresby to Goodenough during July. Led by Learmonth, they took off at 6.44 a.m. on 22nd July from Vivigani airfield. Their bombs destroyed the wireless station building at

[1] W-O L. V. McMahon, 409934; 100 Sqn. Farmer; of Manangatang, Vic; b. Corrong Vale, Vic, 3 Nov 1918. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

Gasmata and they then machine-gunned the station, firing at anything that moved on the ground. The Beaufighters, which came from Milne Bay for the attack, found the Bostons still over the target area when they arrived and the delay interfered with their strafing. Clouds were then very low over Gasmata and visibility poor so they could not see the results of the attack. The Japanese replied with anti-aircraft fire and one of the Beaufighters had its wing tip blown off, but the pilot, Flying Officer Hunt,[2] succeeded in flying the aircraft back to Milne Bay. The Beauforts, led by Hepburn, dropped 15,000 pounds of bombs on the airfield runway in a series of low-level attacks and then strafed buildings, an aircraft on the ground and enemy machine-gun posts. Five of the ten attacking Beauforts were hit by the enemy fire, one piloted by Flight Lieutenant Woollacott,[3] being considerably damaged. The Kittyhawks of No. 75 were on guard above the bombers but the enemy did not send up fighter aircraft to oppose them and the whole of the day's operations were completed without the loss of a single machine.

Four days later, on 26th July, Bostons, Beaufighters and Kittyhawks were sent out again to attack the Ring Ring plantation at Gasmata. The Beaufighters strafed the plantation homestead and the Bostons concentrated on a jetty on which they made two direct hits and then machine-gunned buildings in the area. The Kittyhawks, in addition to providing protection for the bombers, carried bombs of their own. Twenty took off from Vivigani each carrying two 30-lb incendiary and four 40-lb general-purpose bombs. Eight were forced back to their base by bad weather before they could reach the target, but the other twelve, led by Cresswell, followed the Bostons and Beaufighters and dropped all their bombs accurately. Anti-aircraft fire tore holes in several of the Kittyhawks but none crashed. With the decline of Japanese air activity, opportunities for air combat for Allied fighters had diminished in New Guinea and Australian squadron commanders were directed to use aircraft as fighter-bombers and ground strafers so that they would be more actively and usefully employed. This use of the fighter had already become common practice in the Middle East.

Also on 26th July, two Beaufighters (piloted by Flight Lieutenant Burrows[4] and Flying Officer Mills[5]) while on armed reconnaissance in Jacquinot Bay within 100 miles of Rabaul attacked a small Japanese vessel which had been camouflaged with foliage. It was about 200 yards off shore and the Beaufighters sprayed it with machine-gun fire. The vessel increased speed and made for the shore where it ran aground. Next day the Beaufighters accompanied by four Beauforts and with a covering flight of Kittyhawks returned and again attacked this vessel and another one near by. The Beauforts dropped one bomb directly on the larger vessel and both were machine-gunned.

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[2] F-Lt G. Hunt, 415256; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Mt Magnet, WA; b. Kew, Vic, 9 Apr 1919.

[3] F-Lt R. H. Woollacott, 407144; 100 Sqn. Building contractor; of Whyalla, SA; b. Aberdeen, SA, 8 Aug 1910. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

[4] F-Lt M. W. Burrows, 260702; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Elizabeth Bay, NSW; b. Sydney, 13 Jul 1920.

[5] F-Lt R. E. F. Mills, 415434; 30 Sqn. Civil servant; of Cottesloe, WA; b. Kew, Vic, 29 Oct 1920.

The two Catalina squadrons, Nos. 11 and 20, played a part in the New Guinea operations of April to July 1943, although they worked independently of No. 9 Group. Flying from their main base at Cairns in North Queensland they undertook the tasks of dropping mines in enemy harbours, carrying supplies to coastwatchers in enemy-held territory, and making harassing attacks at night on enemy bases. The coastwatchers were working in the Solomons, New Britain and New Ireland, and the Catalinas dropped them containers weighing about 130 pounds each with small parachutes attached, and holding equipment, stores, food, clothing and mail.

The work of the coastwatchers was of vital importance to Admiral Halsey's forces on Guadalcanal and they earned great praise for the manner in which they performed their hazardous duties. They passed information by radio about enemy airfields and aircraft sent on missions against Guadalcanal. They also organised parties to rescue American aircrews shot down in the islands and held them until they could be returned by submarines.

On the night of 26th April a Catalina of No. 11 Squadron, captained by Flight Lieutenant Clark,[6] crashed into a hillside in Bougainville while dropping supplies to coastwatchers.

During May and June the Catalinas carried out night raids on enemy defences and airfields at Cape Gloucester and at Babo in western Dutch New Guinea. On 3rd June a large number of enemy aircraft were caught on the airfield at Babo, as they could be seen by the light of fires lit by the Catalinas' bombing attack. The Catalinas strafed the aircraft with machine-gun fire, damaging and possibly destroying at least twenty.

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[6] F-Lt W. J. Clark, 403318; 20 and 11 Sqns. Clerk; of Windsor, Qld; b. Bundaberg, Qld, 6 May 1917. Killed in action 26 Apr 1943.

Clark, F-O J. N. Potts (Launceston, Tas) and Sgt D. J. Ward (Kingsford, NSW) were killed, and the remaining six crew members (F-O's C. S. Dunn (Woollahra, NSW) and C. J. Twist (Hindmarsh, SA), Sgt F. G. T. Thompson (Henley Beach, SA) and Cpls J. Fenwick (Ipswich, Qld), R. H. A. Wettenhall (Toorak, Vic) and H. Yates (Summer Hill, NSW) ) were injured. They were rescued soon after the crash by a party of Australian soldiers and natives, and taken farther inland to a coastwatchers' camp, where their injuries were treated and arrangements made for their evacuation. The Japanese were now strongly garrisoning Bougainville and the work of the coastwatchers was becoming extremely hazardous because of enemy patrols and the treachery of the natives. On 16 June an enemy force accompanied by hostile natives attacked the camp, killing Dunn, who could barely walk, and capturing Fenwick who had been badly injured in the crash. (Cpl Fenwick was later killed in an Allied bombing attack at Talili Bay, New Britain, while being moved in March 1944 with other prisoners to Watom Island.) The remaining four escaped into the rain forest and in July Wettenhall and Thompson were taken off the island by the American submarine *Guardfish*. Twist and Yates were betrayed by natives to the Japanese garrison at Numa Numa, and are believed to have died while prisoners on Bougainville.

CHAPTER 3

# AIR FIGHTING IN NORTH-WESTERN AREA, APRIL AND MAY, 1943

WHILE General MacArthur prepared a limited offensive in New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, the Japanese moved menacingly on his left flank. Since late in 1942 the *5th* and *48th Japanese Divisions* had been deployed in the Timor-Ambon area north of Darwin. At Dobo, on Aru, a Japanese general had set up his headquarters and his men seemed to offer a threat to the Australian outpost at Merauke in Dutch New Guinea. Searching aircraft brought back news of much shipping activity at Ambon, where, on 20th January alone, they had seen 18 vessels in the harbour. In the arc of islands outside the mainland of Australia the enemy was developing 67 airfields, which, when finished, could accommodate about 1,500 aircraft.

While these activities did not cause alarm, the renewed possibility of a Japanese assault on the mainland had to be considered. The Australian Government was disturbed at the situation and Mr Curtin sought information on it from General MacArthur, who told him by secret telephone on 13th March that although the New Guinea-Solomons area was no longer threatened, the north-west approach through Torres Strait and North Australia was.[1]

The available information about Japanese intentions seemed contradictory. A report had come from the Chinese Government to the effect that the Japanese would invade Australia near Darwin, after a feint attack towards Perth. General Headquarters received another report from the Office of Naval Intelligence, Washington, stating that an agent of "questionable reliability", had indicated that the Japanese were planning a land attack on Australia to be carried out early in 1943. On the other hand, a document which came into Admiral Nimitz' hands, dated 24th December 1942 and prepared by the chief of the Japanese naval staff, expressed the opinion that the Allies were treating the New Guinea-Solomons area merely as a holding position, while their main thrust would be made against Japan through the Timor-Arafura Sea area. If this represented the Japanese view, then their activities in the Arafura Sea could be presumed to be basically defensive.

However, in assessing the danger, these documentary sources of information seem to have been given less weight than the facts of the enemy dispositions. The Japanese had two divisions and could muster two more in the Arafura Sea-Timor area, in addition to a strong air force made up of the *23rd Flotilla* (naval air service) and Japanese army air units of the *7th Air Division* (*Fourth Air Army*). An Allied General Headquarters Intelligence report of 14th March 1943 estimated that a total of 334 Japanese aircraft could be deployed in the north-western area, but a

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War Cabinet Minute 2690 of 16 Mar 1943.

vital factor limiting any aggressive moves by the enemy was a growing shortage of naval and merchant shipping which would probably compel the enemy to execute any projected operation with the troops in the immediate area.

To counter an enemy attack the Allies had only nine squadrons, six of them Australian, all under the control of the R.A.A.F. in the Northern Territory, and commanded by Air Commodore Bladin, but were capable of quickly reinforcing the area from the larger air forces in New Guinea and Queensland. There were three Australian infantry brigades (3rd, 19th and 23rd) in the Northern Territory, and the 1st Armoured Division and three infantry brigades (2nd, 5th and 8th) in Western Australia. It was considered that a Japanese landing on Horn Island or on the Cape York Peninsula would be suicidal, but the enemy was capable of slowly pushing into southern Dutch New Guinea and seemed intent on occupying all this area including Merauke, where one Australian battalion, the 62nd, had been stationed since January 1943.

The likelihood of an attack on Perth was considered remote. The Japanese would need to use carrier-borne aircraft to support such a project, and the difficult supply problem that would be created made it almost impossible, if at the same time the Allies were on the offensive in New Guinea.

The Japanese did not, in fact, have a plan to invade Australia at this time. But the question whether Australia was then in imminent danger became a subject of public controversy. The Hearst chain of newspapers in America campaigned for more aircraft and aid for MacArthur. However, Major George Fielding Eliot, in the *New York Herald Tribune,* said: "The Japanese concentrations north of Australia are aimed chiefly to prevent General MacArthur and Admiral Halsey from getting set for an attack on Rabaul." Joseph Harsch of the *Christian Science Monitor* also belittled the idea that Australia was threatened. He said: "Mr Curtin is pouring out appeals with a regularity which Washington accepts as part of the calendar of fixed monthly events."[2] The following month he wrote: "If the Australia-MacArthur campaign for more attention to the South-West Pacific went on much longer, it was a good bet there would be rather a pointed reprimand delivered to Canberra."

However, the threat, such as it was, of the Japanese movements did not seriously interrupt MacArthur's plans for an offensive in New Guinea. The Australian squadrons in the Northern Territory cooperated with the army in anti-invasion exercises, plans were made to reinforce Merauke and the Northern Territory, but no large-scale movement of Allied forces resulted. The reinforcement of Merauke was in any case part of the already existing plan for the offensive in New Guinea.[3]

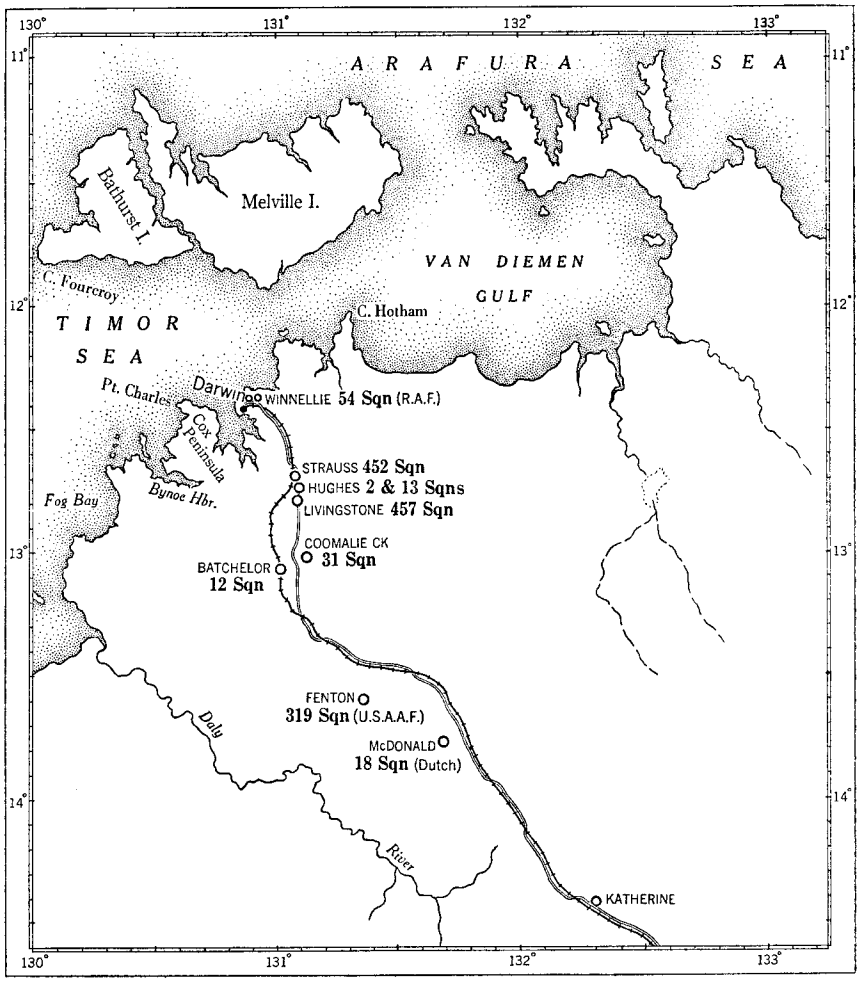
Defence proposals were incorporated into the "Moultrie Plan for the Defence of Australia", issued at General Headquarters on 22nd March.

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[2] *Argus* (Melbourne), 9 Mar 1943.

[3] From January to April 1943 the 62 Bn was stationed in Merauke. During April-May 1943 11 Bde arrived (26, 31/51 Bns), 62 Bn then coming under command of 11 Bde.

This was followed by an operation instruction of 12th April which directed MacArthur's force commanders to "augment facilities and forces in and defend the Merauke-Horn Island-Thursday Island tip of Cape York Peninsula area to be known as the Torres Strait area".




MacArthur directed General Kenney to make immediate preparations for rapid grouping of squadrons in airfields of the Torres Strait area and at Millingimbi in the Northern Territory. He also had to be ready, at 12 hours' notice, to fly an Australian brigade, plus a battalion, to Merauke and his reconnaissance aircraft had to provide a 36-hour warning of hostile movements. However, until a major attack threatened, it was only necessary for him to maintain enough squadrons in the area for reconnais-

sance, destruction of minor hostile forces, and protection of naval movements and shipping. No real interruption of Allied Air Forces operations in the South-West Pacific would occur until a major attack actually threatened the Darwin-Torres Strait area. Only two R.A.A.F. squadrons were to be moved: No. 84 Squadron was ordered to proceed from Richmond to Horn Island where it was to provide patrols of Boomerang aircraft over Merauke, and No. 100, serving with No. 9 Group in New Guinea, was ordered to move from Milne Bay to Horn Island but this movement never took place. In addition, the R.A.A.F. Directorate of Works was to proceed as quickly as possible with the development of air bases at Merauke, Gove, Millingimbi, Horn Island and Jacky Jacky (Higgins Field), but again this work was to be done with existing means and with only minimum diversion from the effort elsewhere.

The squadrons that defended the Darwin area under the command of Air Commodore Bladin included one British, one Dutch, one American and six Australian squadrons, as well as a photographic-reconnaissance flight. In addition, two Catalina squadrons based on Cairns (Nos. 11 and 20) and another at Crawley, near Perth in Western Australia (a United States Navy squadron) were called on from time to time to make attacks against Japanese bases north of Darwin. The squadrons under Bladin's direct control were:

*Australia*

No. 2 (Wing Commander Whyte), general-reconnaissance bombers, equipped with Hudsons, based at Hughes.
No. 12 (Flight Lieutenant Hooper), dive bombers, equipped with Vultee Vengeances, based at Batchelor.
No. 13 (Wing Commander Moran), general-reconnaissance bombers equipped with Hudsons, based at Hughes.
No. 31 (Wing Commander Read), long-range fighters, equipped with Beaufighters, based at Coomalie.
No. 452 (Squadron Leader MacDonald), fighters, equipped with Spitfires, based at Strauss.
No. 457 (Squadron Leader James), fighters, equipped with Spitfires, based at Livingstone.

*United Kingdom*

No. 54 (Squadron Leader Gibbs), fighters, equipped with Spitfires, based at Darwin.

*United States*

No. 319 (Captain Olsen), heavy bombers, equipped with Liberators, based at Fenton.

*Holland*

No. 18 (Lieut-Colonel Fiedeldij), medium bombers, equipped with Mitchells, based at McDonald, then Batchelor.

The three Spitfire squadrons were under the control of No. 1 Fighter Wing, commanded by Group Captain Walters and later by Wing Commander Caldwell. In addition there were in the area No. 44 (Radar) Wing, with its twelve radar stations, and No. 61 (Works) Wing with its

airfield constructional units, together with the medical, repair and servicing, signals, stores and other miscellaneous units which supported them.

The area was served by nine operational base units located at Groote Eylandt (No. 51), Darwin (No. 52), Batchelor (No. 53), Venn (No. 54), Birdum (No. 55), Daly Waters (No. 56), Alice Springs (No. 57), Drysdale Mission (No. 58), and Millingimbi (No. 59). There were also a number of advanced operational bases which were used by staging aircraft but which had only the barest facilities. The state of some of the more isolated air bases in the undeveloped north-west of Australia was not always satisfactory. Some of the airfields were little more than cleared stretches of ground which rain or the growth of spinifex grass frequently made unserviceable. In the wet season rivers were frequently flooded, motor vehicles were bogged on the roads and the problem of supply and maintenance became acute. At Drysdale when rain made motor traffic impossible horses were sometimes called into service. Supply was effected by air and sea as well as by army convoys, but in May 1943 the air transport squadrons of the R.A.A.F. had only thirteen aircraft for carrying out all transport responsibilities. Lack of equipment was another factor causing delays in the repairing of roads and airfields. In addition to the discomfort of excessive heat and the monotony of tinned food, the men had to put up with swarms of flies by day and mosquitoes and sand-flies by night.

No. 18 (Netherlands East Indies) Squadron was formed at Canberra in 1942. The pilots of the squadron were mainly former Dutch transport aircraft pilots, but, as the Dutch had only untrained natives as ground staff, the R.A.A.F. had to supply skilled maintenance men as well as air gunners. About 286 R.A.A.F. and 236 Netherlands East Indies men made up the squadron. Administration proved difficult because of different standards of discipline, hygiene and outlook. Although some Australians assigned to the squadron found conditions satisfactory, others asked for transfer to Australian squadrons. However, this feeling settled down on the transfer of the squadron from McDonald to Batchelor.

War in North-Western Area was basically different from that in the New Guinea theatre. It was almost entirely an air war, with raid and counter-raid. Air fights were taking place over the bases, and bombers were attacking opposing airfields, ships and barges; but no ground troops were engaged except the gunners who manned the anti-aircraft weapons.

Air Commodore Bladin's main task was to defend the north of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the Torres Strait area. It was a vital task because these areas lay on the flank of MacArthur's main concentrations and had to be adequately protected to ensure the success of his projected offensive. Bladin controlled air operations, but when a major attack impended, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock was to coordinate operations, because squadrons of both North-Western and North-Eastern areas would be involved in countering it.

April 1943 was a quiet month for the Spitfire squadrons which defended the Darwin area. The enemy did not send one raider against them during the month, whereas in March there had been two heavy raids, one of them by 44 aircraft which were intercepted by Spitfire pilots who destroyed seven, but not before the enemy had done considerable damage to fuel storage tanks. We know now that the *23rd Japanese Air Flotilla,* with headquarters at Kendari, in Celebes, was under orders to make monthly attacks on Darwin and Merauke, in addition to carrying out shipping searches in the Torres Strait. The Japanese Navy which controlled this flotilla evidently preferred to make heavy raids at intervals rather than send frequent small-scale attacks against Allied targets.

By contrast with the Spitfire squadrons, the Beaufighter crews of No. 31 Squadron, Mitchell crews of No. 18 Squadron, and American Liberator crews were busily engaged in attacks on air bases and shipping, while the obsolescent Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron carried out armed searches and occasional attacks. No. 13 Squadron, which was also equipped with Hudsons, flew only six sorties in April, after which it moved south to Canberra to rest and re-form after having been continuously on service since December 1941. The No. 380 (American) Bombardment Group, then arriving in Australia, had been assigned to reinforce the North-Western Area and would considerably strengthen the bombing effort of the area when it began operations.

Japanese fighter opposition was still strong in Timor, Ambon and the islands of the Arafura Sea and raiding squadrons of North-Western Area were often engaged in air fights. Because of the threat of enemy air action Bladin kept his bombers well back from the coast while the fighters were placed at Darwin or slightly inland where they could intercept incoming enemy raiders.

On 17th April three Liberators of No. 319 Squadron which bombed Ambon town were intercepted by ten enemy fighters over Ambon, but suffered only minor damage from enemy fire. The following day thirteen Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron and nine Mitchells of No. 18 attacked the Penfui airfield near Koepang on Timor. Penfui was one of the enemy's most important air bases and on 15th April 38 aircraft were seen on Timor airfields. The Hudsons, which had a shorter range than the Mitchells, found it necessary to stage in at Drysdale, the advanced base in Western Australia where, in the previous month, No. 58 Operational Base Unit had been formed under the command of Flight Lieutenant Bragg,[4] who organised the base in the face of many difficulties.

The attack was to take place at night and it was hoped that the airfield would stand out clearly in the moonlight. The Mitchells attacked first, reaching the target just after midnight. Coming in at a height of 3,500 feet they were met by heavy anti-aircraft fire when over the target but none was hit. The first Hudson (captained by Squadron Leader Kemp[5])

[4] F-Lt F. L. Bragg, 262128. Comd Daly Waters OBU 1942, 58 and 55 OBU's 1943, 12 OBU 1943-44. Grazier; of Aberdeen, NSW; b. Cootamundra, NSW, 27 Oct 1902.
[5] W Cdr K. M. Kemp, DFC, 250728. 13 and 2 Sqns; comd 463 Sqn 1945. Clerk; of Hampton, Vic; b. Clifton Hill, Vic, 9 Feb 1918.

left Drysdale at 12.30 a.m. but when half an hour out his engines failed and then recovered again. There was continued engine trouble so Kemp decided to return to Drysdale where he found water in his fuel tanks. This fuel had been taken on at Drysdale. Kemp took off later, but, because of cloud, could not find the target and finally jettisoned his bombs. Meanwhile, the other twelve Hudsons reached Penfui and bombed in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire. Flying Officer Austin[6] was told to remain over the target area at a height of 20,000 feet while the rest of the Hudsons made their bombing runs on the airfield. He flew his aircraft back and forth between Koepang and Penfui for half an hour to confuse the enemy defences. He then dropped his bombs from 19,000 feet and returned to Drysdale. In order to protect the Hudsons while they refuelled at Drysdale three Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron were sent to the base but no enemy attack developed. The bombing of Penfui appeared to be successful and all aircraft returned to base without damage.

Next day (19th April) two Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron failed to return from a mission to bomb Timuka in Dutch New Guinea and although wreckage of the two aircraft was found the cause of their loss could not be explained. The Hudsons were to stage through the base at Millingimbi before leaving the Australian coast, and they took off within four minutes of each other early in the morning. Soon afterwards several loud explosions were heard and it was considered probable that the aircraft, which were to fly in formation, had collided in the air. Accidents and the weather took a toll of aircraft. On 26th April a Beaufighter of No. 31 Squadron disappeared in bad weather during a sortie to the Aru islands.

On 24th April nine American Liberators flew to Celebes to attack aircraft on the airfield and aircraft installations at Kendari. Their bombs fell on the workshop area causing fires which could be seen at a distance of 75 miles, and it appeared they had also destroyed at least four twin-engined aircraft. Enemy fighters engaged them as they completed the bombing but inflicted only slight damage on the Liberators. Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron on a search for enemy shipping on the Timor coast were also intercepted by enemy fighters three days later. They jettisoned their bombs on a village and although the enemy fighters fired a number of bursts at them, they failed to score a hit and the Mitchells returned safely to Darwin.

The three Spitfire squadrons at Darwin had been sent from the United Kingdom for the defence of Australia as a result of negotiations between Mr Churchill and Dr Evatt in 1942. Nos. 452 and 457 were Australian squadrons formed under the Empire Air Training Scheme; No. 54 was a British squadron, and while in the Pacific was to remain a unit of the Royal Air Force with its members subject to the conditions of that force.

The Spitfire was superior to the Zero, though less manoeuvrable at low speeds than the Japanese aircraft. In straight-and-level flight and in

[6] F-Lt J. S. Austin, DFC, 400363. 608 Sqn RAF; 32, 13 and 2 Sqns. Stock agent; of Lara, Vic; b. Melbourne, 15 May 1918. Died on active service 9 Nov 1943.

a dive, the Spitfire was faster, but the Zero could climb faster than Spitfires, Lightnings or Kittyhawks. The Zero's maximum speed was between 348 and 358 miles an hour, whereas the Spitfire had a top speed of 365. The Kittyhawk was slightly slower—343 miles an hour. It was considered unwise for Allied pilots to "dog-fight" with the Zero, and Spitfire pilots were told not to do so. The tactics recommended were a high-speed attack after which the pilot should break away by diving or spiralling until out of attacking range and then climb again for another high-speed attack.

Wing Commander Caldwell, who commanded the Spitfires in action against the Japanese, combined great bravery with capable leadership and cool confidence. Air Marshal Tedder[7] said of him, after his service in the Middle East, that he was "a fine commander, an excellent leader and a first-class shot". In 1941 and 1942 he was credited officially with having shot down more enemy aircraft than any other Australian flying in the Middle East or in Europe, and received rapid promotion to squadron leader, commanding No. 112 Squadron R.A.F. Caldwell laid great emphasis on gunnery, which he himself practised constantly. His view was that "a pilot who could not shoot straight might as well remain on the ground because he was useless in a fighter squadron". The purpose of a fighter was to destroy the enemy, the means gunnery, therefore gunnery was all important. He instilled this doctrine into the minds of the men he now led and trained. "Shadow" shooting was widely adopted during training in the desert and later, when Caldwell returned to Australia, he introduced the method at No. 1 Operational Training Unit for fighters at Mildura.

Caldwell was an alert, fast-talking, quick-acting man with an exuberant confidence. It was his belief that a man must have faith in himself. If he did not he could not expect the confidence of others. He showed great aggressiveness in combat. On one occasion in the Western Desert his own aircraft was damaged and he was wounded in the face, arms and legs, yet returned to attack a Messerschmitt fighter.[8]

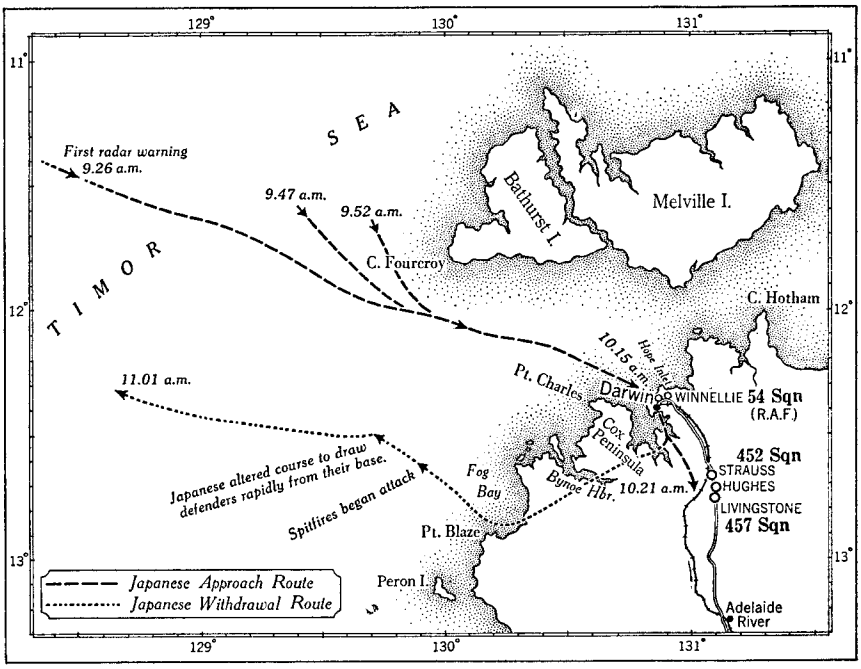
After their first engagements in February and March there had been a lull for the Spitfires. Among the 95 pilots of the fighter wing was a sprinkling of experienced men who had distinguished records in Europe and the Middle East. There were 6 fully-experienced pilots, and 37 who had had some fighter combat experience. The lull in April, during which no raiders appeared except a lone reconnaissance aircraft which escaped when attempts were made to intercept it, was not to their liking. A note of impatience is struck by the writer of No. 457 Squadron's historical report for April. It read:

> This month has been a heavy strain on the patience of both air and ground crews. Lack of action and days of monotonous routine and hot weather tend

[7] Marshal of RAF Lord Tedder, GCB. Dep AOC-in-C RAF ME 1940-41; AOC-in-C RAF ME 1941-43; Air C-in-C Medit Air Cd 1943; Dep Supreme Cdr Europe 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of London; b. Glenguin, Scotland, 11 Jul 1890.

[8] See J. Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943* (1954), p. 105, in this series.

to make the squadron personnel a little restless as there are no facilities for enjoying brief respites away from service life. The weekly cinema showings are attended by almost every member of the squadron. Aeroplane serviceability is high. A number of our pilots are enjoying seven days' home leave, which does not include travelling time.




However, within a few days of the writing of this report an eventful raid occurred. At 9.26 a.m. on Sunday, 2nd May, the radar station at Cape Fourcroy on Bathurst Island (commanded by Flying Officer Jordan[9]) recorded "plots" of enemy aircraft about 160 miles west-north-west of Darwin and immediately warned No. 5 Fighter Sector headquarters at Darwin. Further plots on the radar screen showed that the enemy machines were flying towards Darwin. Four minutes after the first news of the plot was received all Spitfire pilots off duty were ordered to the airfields. The radar station now judged that a large number of enemy aircraft were approaching and at 9.40 the controller (Wing Commander Primrose[1]) ordered Nos. 54, 452 and 457 Squadrons into the air.

The three squadrons, which were based on three different airfields, were ordered to rendezvous over Hughes airfield at 10,000 feet. Primrose then directed Caldwell, as wing leader, to climb to 30,000 feet to a point

[9] Sqn Ldr J. Jordan, 266600. Comd Cape Fourcroy Radar Stn 1943; Staff Radar Offr Southern Area 1944-45. Radio engineer; of Lismore, NSW; b. Glasgow, Scotland, 18 Jun 1903.

[1] Gp Capt T. Primrose, AFC, 260189. Comd 2 SFTS 1941; ALO Northern Territory Force HQ 1942; comd 5 Fighter Sector 1942-43, 2 Fighter Sector 1943-44, 6 and 15 Sqns and 71 Wing 1945. Solicitor; of North Sydney; b. Sydney, 15 Apr 1912.

10 miles north-east of Darwin and told him to expect a formation of 20 or more bombers, escorted by a large number of fighters then approaching at a height of 25,000 feet.[2] When Caldwell received this message he ordered the wing to turn right and climb as rapidly as possible into the sun. Soon afterwards he gave the controller the "tally-ho" signal. As the bombers crossed Darwin harbour they were flying at a height of 27,000 feet while the 33 Spitfires were 10 miles north-east of the town at a height of 26,000 feet. The Spitfires continued to climb but by the time they reached the same height as the bombers the Japanese fighter escorts were plainly in view 4,000 feet higher. Except that the defenders had the sun behind them, the Japanese were in the better position, and Caldwell decided that it would be unwise to attack the bombers before they had dropped their bombs. He therefore continued to climb into the sun in order to gain height over the fighters. The Darwin anti-aircraft guns then went into action and fired 219 rounds, which reached the correct height but exploded behind or to the side of the bombers causing no damage. At about 10.15 the bombers dropped 100 bombs on a line extending from the old Darwin air force station through the south-eastern part of the airfield into the bush, causing slight damage to two buildings and temporarily cutting electric light and telephone lines. One soldier was killed.

Caldwell directed No. 54 Squadron to engage the fighters and if possible to penetrate to the bombers. Then No. 457 Squadron was to fly out of the sun to attack the bombers. After this No. 457 was to climb back into the sun and the squadron leader, at his discretion, was to call on No. 452 to protect him from Japanese fighters during this withdrawal. He waited another eight minutes until the enemy aircraft which were flying down-wind and losing height were 40 miles to sea off Point Blaze. The Spitfires at 32,000 feet were at this stage 10,000 feet above the enemy fighters and 12,000 feet above the bombers.

Caldwell then ordered No. 54 Squadron, led by Gibbs, to begin the attack, and the Spitfires came hurtling down at 400 miles an hour in an almost vertical dive. The steep angle of attack was an unfamiliar method to the less experienced pilots and tended to upset their aim when they opened fire. A Zeke attacked by Gibbs was caught by surprise and went down smoking. The formations immediately broke up and dog-fights took place at about 7,000 feet, with aircraft turning figures-of-eight as pilots tried to get on each other's tails. Pulling away, Gibbs saw disturbances on the surface of the sea and one of the Spitfires spinning down. He climbed and attacked again, in the course of which one of his cannons ceased firing. Finding he had only twenty-two gallons of petrol in his tanks he then returned to base landing with only two gallons remaining.

As No. 54 Squadron dived to attack, No. 457 Squadron, as prearranged, dived in line-astern to attack the bombers. The angle of dive was about 70 degrees and the speed almost 400 miles an hour. (The

[2] The actual numbers were 18 bombers and 27 fighters.

pilots considered later that this angle was too great for manoeuvring and aiming at the enemy bombers.) The Zekes protecting the bombers turned head on toward No. 457 Squadron Spitfires, diverting their attack to such an extent that only four of the eleven penetrated to the bombers. Dog-fights with the enemy fighters followed.

After No. 457 Squadron had attacked, Caldwell led the remaining squadron, No. 452, into the battle. Diving at a steep angle he attacked a Zeke from a range of 350 yards. One of his cannons failed to fire and only ten shots came from the other causing the machine to slew. Caldwell missed the Zeke and was immediately afterwards himself attacked by another two Zekes. He dived under these but another one came up behind him. This aircraft was seen by Pilot Officer Fox[3] who fired on it from above until it turned away. Fox engaged another Zeke but the enemy pilot skilfully turned his machine and scored hits on the engine of Fox's machine. Fox turned the Spitfire on its back and parachuted into the sea. He was later rescued from his rubber dinghy. Flying Officer Goldsmith, after scoring hits on a bomber which he believed he destroyed was attacked by a Hap and had his controls shot away. He was flung out of his machine and descended to the sea by parachute. Another pilot got an enemy aircraft in his sights but his guns had frozen and would not fire.

These are some of the incidents of a brief but furious engagement, in which the Australians claimed that 6 enemy aircraft were destroyed, 4 probably destroyed and 8 damaged. At this stage of the fight 5 Spitfires had been lost to enemy action, but the pilots of 3 were in rubber boats in the water. Two pilots had been killed. However, the enemy fighters had achieved their purpose of protecting their bombers, only one of which had been shot down.

At 10.36 a.m., sixteen minutes after the action began, Caldwell warned all pilots to check their petrol and if necessary return to base. This warning was repeated at 10.40 by Primrose. Under normal conditions all pilots would have been able to reach base but petrol had been used at a high rate during battle climbs. This factor, together with keenness and excitement in combat, an adverse wind, and the action of the pilots in circling over the water to discover the exact position of their comrades who had been shot down, led to some delaying their return to base too long. Another factor was that Caldwell, in manoeuvring for a favourable position, held his attack rather too long, which led the Spitfires to be drawn farther away from their base. However, in waiting until his whole wing was in position for attack Caldwell was following instructions. The Spitfire Wing had been criticised in a previous engagement because "sections, flights and squadrons intercepted the enemy in 'penny packets' with the result that little damage was done and they were heavily outnumbered". Caldwell was trying to avoid a piecemeal interception and in this he succeeded.

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[3] F-Lt K. J. Fox, 402330. 124 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn. Salesman; of Strathfield, NSW; b. Ashfield, NSW, 12 Sep 1919.

As a result of fuel shortage 5 aircraft made forced landings before reaching airfields, but 4 of these were recovered and repaired. Three more were forced to land because of engine failure and one of these was a total loss. Two men had been killed and 8 Spitfires destroyed during the action. Another pilot (Flight Sergeant Stagg[4]) was unaccounted for but was found alive some days later.

The Japanese, after the raid, claimed they had shot down 21 Spitfires, and that only 6 of their bombers had been "hit by shells" and damaged. They were led in the air by Lieut-Commander Suzuki Minoru, commander of the *202nd Air Corps* of the *23rd Air Flotilla.* Both fighters and bombers flew from Penfui airfield and their objective was to bomb Darwin airfield.

The General Headquarters press announcement (Communiqué No. 386) after referring to the ground damage caused by the Japanese as being negligible, went on to say that "our own air losses were heavy". News of the fight was given wide publicity and the Japanese made propaganda use of it in broadcasts. The Melbourne *Argus* of 4th May stated: "This is the first occasion that any communiqué issued in this area has reported heavy losses." Later press references pointed out that "bad weather [a reference to the head wind which delayed the Spitfires when they turned for base] and not ace pilots helped Japan to our disadvantage in the air battle over Darwin on Sunday".[5] But the wind on the day was only six to eight miles per hour.

These reports reached the squadrons in Darwin. The pilots resented them and Bladin asked Bostock to correct the statements. He said: "The alarmist tendency of the press and radio references was having a bad effect on the combat pilots." Many discussions and conferences took place between pilots and leaders to analyse the action and draw conclusions. One conclusion was that it was essential that Spitfires should carry a larger fuel supply. It was also concluded that it was desirable that interception of raiding aircraft should take place as early as possible. Pilots were also later issued with strict instructions not to dog-fight.

The Advisory War Council, disturbed by news of the engagement, asked the Chief of the Air Staff for a full report dealing in particular with losses due to petrol shortage and engine failure. Air Vice-Marshal Jones reported that engine failures were not due to poor maintenance but to the inexperience of pilots in handling their machines under combat conditions, and that the fuel shortages experienced by a number of pilots could "only be attributed to an error of judgment on the part of the wing leader, bearing in mind the inexperience of a number of his pilots". In reply to this criticism Caldwell claimed that all pilots were properly directed during the engagement and if they had obeyed instructions would have reached base safely.

Mr Drakeford reported to Mr Curtin that the communiqué had given information of value to the enemy and asked Curtin to point out to

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[4] F-Lt R. S. Stagg, 407915; 452 Sqn. Electrical engineer; of Underdale, SA; b. Thebarton, SA, 15 Dec 1919.

[5] *Herald* (Melbourne), 4 May 1943.

MacArthur that a "more palliating impression should have been conveyed". But MacArthur denied that the message disclosed information of value to the enemy, adding that newspapers had criticised him claiming that "too rosy a picture is presented by the communiqués".

The air war in North-Western Area now flared up considerably. The Spitfire squadrons were on their mettle and eager to refute the belief which gained some currency in the south that they had not done well against the Japanese.

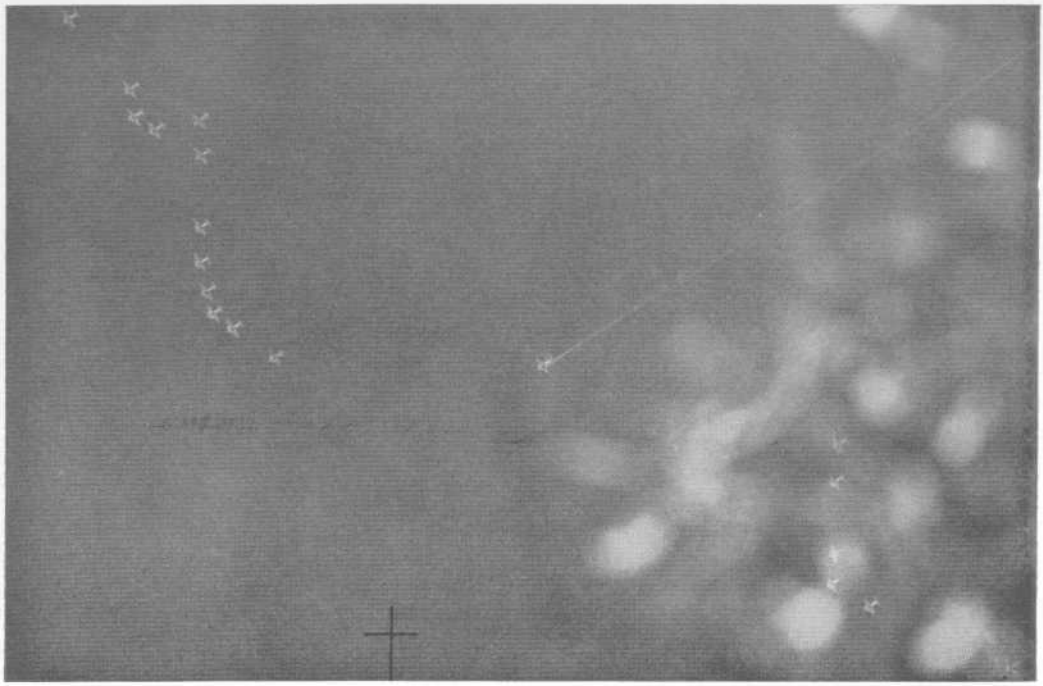
Bladin decided on immediate counter-measures and ordered No. 31 Squadron to raid the airfield at Penfui, where it was presumed (correctly) the enemy aircraft would be landing after their Darwin raid. The existence of airfield facilities at Drysdale would enable the Beaufighters to land there on their way back and refuel. Wing Commander Read led four Beaufighters (though one had to turn back soon after because of a hatch opening), taking off from Coomalie Creek just after midday on 2nd May. The Beaufighters came in at an extremely low level to attack the airfield line-abreast at 230 miles an hour. Read opened fire on two Zekes, one of which was taxi-ing from a blast-pen, and destroyed them both, probably killing the pilot of one. Another Beaufighter pilot fired on two bombers which caught fire, while another got an enemy aircraft in his sights but his guns would not fire. When the Beaufighters withdrew they were pursued out to sea by enemy fighters but after thirty minutes' pursuit the enemy broke off. The Beaufighters landed at Drysdale, refuelled and returned to Coomalie next morning.

At night on the 2nd May Bladin sent Mitchell bombers to follow up the destruction at Penfui caused by the Beaufighters. Four aircraft of No. 18 Squadron with mixed Dutch and Australian crews bombed the airfield after midnight at five-minute intervals, using flares to light the area. Three of their bombs appeared to drop and explode on buildings near the runway.

Enemy aircraft were fighting back during these counter-blows. The Beaufighters attacking Penfui on 2nd May had been intercepted, and on the 4th an enemy single-engined fighter intercepted and opened fire on a Hudson of No. 2 Squadron which was returning from a bombing mission to the Kai Islands. The same day six Liberators of No. 319 Squadron which bombed Babo airfield in Dutch New Guinea were intercepted twice. The first interception occurred over Babo itself and the second by seven fighters over Maikoor Island farther south.

The Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons added to the weight of the bombardment effort against enemy airfields on 6th May when they attacked Babo, while Mitchells attacked Dili, in Timor, the Liberators bombed Manokwari and Kai in Dutch New Guinea, and Saumlaki, and the Beaufighters destroyed nine enemy float-planes at Taberfane, in the Aru Islands.

For some time Japanese float-planes had been intercepting Allied reconnaissance aircraft in the Aru Islands area, and the day before the



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Japanese Betty bombers over Fenton Field, Northern Territory, 6th July 1943. The Betty trailing smoke, and unable to keep up with its formation, has been hit in the port engine in an attack by one of the Spitfires which intercepted the raiders.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

An attack by Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron on the jetty at Larat, in the Banda-Arafura Sea area, on 29th July 1943.



*(Australian War Memorial.)*

The 503rd American Parachute Regiment and artillerymen of the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment parachuting into the Markham Valley on 5th September 1943. The smoke-screen was intended to hide the landing from Japanese aircraft.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

The old Nadzab airfield; looking east, 15th November 1943.

Beaufighter attack a bomber crew had noticed several in the water at Taberfane. Bladin ordered an immediate attack by available Beaufighter aircraft. Led by Squadron Leader Savage,[6] the Beaufighters flew to Millingimbi airfield where they stayed overnight. Next morning before sunrise they took off and flew in formation through thunderstorms to Taberfane. The float-planes were well silhouetted against the white sand of the beach and two were anchored slightly off shore when the Beaufighters arrived. Savage checked his formation and then began a dive from about 1,300 feet, opening fire with his cannon which set one of the float-planes on fire. A Japanese bullet struck Savage's machine, passing through the throttle controls and entering the fuel tank. But the self-sealing compound in the tank stopped the petrol leaking. When the Beaufighters returned for a second run they saw columns of smoke rising above the float-planes. From then on the pilots passed back and forth and destroyed nine aircraft before all cannons had stopped firing due to faults. When Savage called his flight together again one machine, piloted by Flying Officer Budd[7], did not join him and he and his navigator were later posted missing.

The Japanese had observed the development which had taken place at Millingimbi where No. 59 Operational Base Unit was now established. The base was being used more and more as an operating base and staging airfield for the Australian squadrons. The Beaufighters had used Millingimbi in their destructive raid against float-planes and the enemy was provoked into retaliation.

On 9th May the Millingimbi radar station picked up indications of enemy aircraft approaching. This was at 10.40 a.m. and the enemy aircraft were still seventy miles off. At 11.10 seven enemy Sally-type bombers appeared and dropped "daisy cutters" on the mission, airfield and on shipping, killing a soldier, an aboriginal and ten air force men. Ten of the bombs fell on the runway which was not, however, seriously damaged. Flying Officer Delaporte,[8] pilot of a Beaufighter based at Millingimbi on convoy-escort duty, was ordered to attempt an interception. He took off in the Beaufighter and climbed to 15,000 feet, by which time the enemy had dropped their bombs. Delaporte then attacked out of the sun, turning on to the stern of one of the Sallys. Unfortunately his cannon fired only for two seconds having become clogged with fine sand grit from the dusty, unsealed airfield. Although he chased and easily caught the slowly-moving bombers, the cannon would not fire again.

Further raids could be expected at Millingimbi so Bladin ordered six Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron to protect the base. Five of these Spitfires were ordered into the air next morning when the radar operators reported "unidentified" aircraft approaching. When the Spitfires reached a height of 14,000 feet they saw two Beaufighters which had been sent with four

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[6] Gp Capt G. W. Savage, DFC, 168. 31 Sqn; Senior Staff Offr Training, 1 Gp 1944-45; Staff Officer Operations and Training 1 TAF 1945. Regular air force offr; of Kensington Park, SA; b. Adelaide, 12 Jun 1917.

[7] F-O W. J. C. Budd, 406971; 31 Sqn. Motor mechanic; of Guildford, WA; b. Midland Junction, WA, 22 Aug 1915. Killed in action 6 May 1943.

[8] F-Lt D. W. B. Delaporte, 407573; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of St Peters, SA; b. St Peters, 19 Apr 1916.

others to Taberfane on what proved an abortive mission. These aircraft had caused the alarm to be sounded and the Spitfires therefore decided to return to the airfield. However, while they were coming in to land another warning was passed to the Spitfires of more "unidentified" aircraft approaching on the same course as the returning Beaufighters.

One of the Spitfires at Millingimbi (Flying Officer Hamilton's[9]) did not leave the ground. There was no system of fighter control at Millingimbi and Hamilton decided to remain on the ground and use his aircraft radio to keep in touch with the other fighters. From the radar station, which was tracing the movements of the enemy, messages were sent by telephone to the signals hut at the runways intersection. The messages were then relayed from this hut by a chain of six men to the pilot sitting in his Spitfire who passed them on to the Spitfires in the air. Six of the enemy raiding force of nine Zekes attacked the Spitfires at 9.30 a.m. while they were still climbing and not properly formed up. The Spitfires were forced to engage at the enemy's best height. A furious dog-fight ensued in which no particular tactics were used, but Pilot Officers Morse[1] and Watson[2] each destroyed a Zeke.

Meanwhile, the other three Zekes made a series of strafing attacks on the runway. The two Beaufighters which had caused the original alarm to be sounded had now landed and they were promptly attacked on the ground. One caught fire and was destroyed and the other damaged. Two other Beaufighters which had been assigned to convoy duty were damaged. One was attacked by the Zekes while on the ground and the other by a Hap shortly after taking off. The pilot did not realise he was being attacked until he saw tracer bullets flying past him. He then opened up his motors to full speed taking evasive action.

A damaged Spitfire (Pilot Officer Little[3]) landed at Millingimbi not knowing it was under strafing attack but immediately took off again when he discovered what was happening. For ten minutes between a height of 300 feet and the ground he engaged a Zeke in a furious battle of steep turns and dives. The fight ended in the Spitfire crashing into the ground. It somersaulted three or four times. Both wings and the airscrew were ripped off, yet Little escaped serious injury and walked back to the airfield three miles away.

During the raid the enemy had attacked the store ship *Maroubra*. Their cannon set the vessel on fire and it was destroyed. A Spitfire engaged an enemy float-plane which was attacking two other vessels and this aircraft crashed into the sea.

Next day another float-plane dropped a bomb aimed at a corvette as it was entering Wessel Island harbour, but missed. A Beaufighter, piloted

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[9] F-O F. D. Hamilton, 403050. 131 Sqn RAF, 457 Sqn. Insurance agent; of Thirroul, NSW; b. Thirroul, 24 Jun 1915. Killed in action 6 Jul 1943.

[1] F-Lt I. S. Morse, 403358. 91 Sqn RAF, 452 and 457 Sqns. Clerk; of Manly, NSW; b. Woy Woy, NSW, 5 Mar 1922.

[2] F-Lt R. W. Watson, 404714; 457 Sqn. Car salesman; of Lismore, NSW; b. Woolacombe, Devon, Eng, 17 Oct 1914.

[3] F-Lt B. Little, 403521; 457 Sqn. Clerk; of Manly, NSW; b. N Sydney, 24 Jan 1921.

by Flight Lieutenant Madden,[4] was over the corvette at the time giving cover and it attacked the float-plane. An extract from the report of the encounter reads:

> Pilot gave the Beaufighter full throttle and attacked the enemy floatplane which turned east and then north, taking evasive action, and heading into the storm for cover. Beaufighter at a height of 1,000 feet made an attack between 4 and 5 o'clock, giving from 300 yards a burst which hit the engine, which burst into flames; then closed into 150 yards and gave another burst knocking large chunks out of the fuselage. Enemy floatplane went for about 300 yards and then dived into the sea in flames, falling between two ships. . . .

To the end of May Mitchells, Beaufighters, Liberators and Hudsons attacked enemy airfields within range in an attempt to drive the enemy from them and put them out of action as airfields, thereby preventing their use as jumping-off places for air attack on Australia. With the small force available, however, the elimination of these Japanese airfields could not be expected for some time. Constant patrolling at sea to ensure early warning of possible enemy surface attacks, protection of sea lanes and close escort for surface vessels were exacting tasks which consumed much of the available air strength at Bladin's disposal. All squadrons except the short-ranged Spitfires took part in these reconnaissance duties, so important to the conduct of air war in the north-western theatre.

The most favoured target of the Mitchells was the airfield at Penfui in Timor. But at times Liberators and Beaufighters joined in to bomb this important enemy base, the existence of which was a constant threat to the safety of Darwin.

On the 19th May Beaufighters and Liberators attacked the airfield. Six Beaufighters led by Flight Lieutenant Biven[5] arrived over it at sunrise on this day. The Japanese, however, were thoroughly alert. Anti-aircraft weapons began firing heavily and enemy fighters, which were on patrol over the airfield at the time, attacked the Beaufighters immediately after they strafed and had destroyed two enemy bombers on the ground. Three of the six Beaufighters (piloted by Flying Officers Frith[6] and Taylor[7] and Sergeant Armstrong[8]) were lost. Two of these are believed to have crashed into the hills south of Penfui and the third into the sea after being hit by anti-aircraft fire. Zekes followed the three remaining Beaufighters for 100 miles to sea, but without getting close enough for accurate shooting. Biven arrived at base with pieces of wood in his aircraft caused by crashing through a tree.

The Liberators attacked some three hours later from a height of about 14,000 feet and their bombs all struck in the target area. They too were attacked by fighters, three of which they claimed to destroy.

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[4] Sqn Ldr J. A. Madden, 260740. 31, 38 and 32 Sqns. Engineer; of Eastwood, NSW; b. Eastwood, 4 Apr 1919.

[5] Sqn Ldr P. E. Biven, 280775; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of North Walkerville, SA; b. Sydney, 29 Jul 1917.

[6] F-O E. J. Frith, 420180; 31 Sqn. Motor salesman; of Lismore, NSW; b. Lismore, 18 Nov 1918. Killed in action 19 May 1943.

[7] F-O R. MacD. Taylor, 417009; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of Rose Park, SA; b. Kingswood, SA, 20 Jun 1921. Killed in action 19 May 1943.

[8] Sgt N. G. Armstrong, 413721; 31 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Lithgow, NSW; b. Woonona, NSW, 30 Jun 1923. Killed in action 19 May 1943.

The Beaufighters carried out a number of missions against the Langgur airfield in the Kai Islands during May. On the 17th they destroyed three enemy fighters on the ground. When they attacked this same target again on 31st May the enemy was ready for them and six Zekes attacked, causing some damage to the Beaufighters but all returned safely to Darwin after destroying two enemy machines.

On 28th May the Japanese made their third and last attack on Millingimbi airfield. Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron were on duty there and earlier warning of the attack was given, allowing six aircraft led by Flight Lieutenant Watson[9] to gain height to meet the raiders. The Japanese force consisted of eight bombers escorted by five Zekes and they flew over the base at a height of 20,000 feet. In spite of the interception of the Spitfires the enemy bombers made four runs over the target. The Spitfires destroyed three of these, but two Spitfires with their pilots disappeared into the Arafura Sea and a third was damaged on landing.

By the end of May, after vigorous efforts by the few squadrons available, it was clear that the fight for air mastery over the Japanese bases in the islands just north of Darwin had not been won.[1] Losses on both sides had been heavy in relation to the total air crews engaged. Reinforcements of heavy bombers were now arriving in the Northern Territory, and, with the opening of MacArthur's New Guinea offensive, a new phase of the struggle was about to begin.

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[9] F-Lt P. H. Watson, DFC, 402267; 457 Sqn. Accountant; of Vaucluse, NSW; b. Melbourne, 9 Feb 1915.

[1] The following table shows the increase in activity by the RAAF squadrons in North-Western Area between 1 March and the end of May 1943. A comparison of losses inflicted by Australian squadrons with those suffered from Japanese attack is also shown. The figures do not take into account aircraft lost in accidents.

| Squadron | Operational Sorties Mar | Apr | May | Enemy Aircraft Destroyed Mar-May 1943 | Allied Aircraft Destroyed by Enemy Action | Lost on Operations: Other Causes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. 2 | 63 | 103 | 135 | — | 2 | 3 |
| No. 18 | 46 | 57 | 72 | 2 | 5 | 2 |
| No. 31 | 37 | 49 | 99 | 20 | 6 | 2 |
| No. 54 | 30 | — | 59 | 10 | 1 | 1 |
| No. 452 | 11 | — | 36 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| No. 457 | 24 | — | 68 | 9 | 1 | 3 |
| | 211 | 209 | 469 | 46 | 17 | 13 |

CHAPTER 4

# "A SHOW OF FORCE" FROM THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

BY June of 1943 the Japanese still had not attempted to land in the north-western or Torres Strait areas of Australia and the chances of even a token attack or demonstration appeared to be diminishing, but the possibility was still causing some anxiety to the local commanders. Major-General Allen,[1] the commander of Northern Territory Force, had expressed misgivings about the air strength available to Air Commodore Bladin to resist an invasion if it should come. In Washington, however, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff assured the Australian Minister for External Affairs, Dr Evatt (then seeking more aircraft for the Australian air force) that Allied land forces in Australia were "sufficient not only for the defence of Australia, but to continue with the plans of limited offensive operations". Allied air forces in the Australian area were larger than the Japanese forces there and while Allied naval forces were less than the enemy's "there were sufficient, in conjunction with shore-based aircraft, not only for the defence of Australia, but for its part in our present offensive operations".

Perhaps the most vital consideration was that Japanese shipping tonnage available for operations had fallen to 600,000 tons and was still falling. It seemed unlikely that the Japanese could afford to suffer the serious shipping losses which might be expected to follow a seaborne assault, or undertake the added risks entailed in further stretching sea communications. Extracts from the Appreciation cabled by Dr Evatt are:

> The reversals at Guadalcanal and in New Guinea have brought home to the Japanese the risks involved in seaborne expeditions in the face of land based aircraft. Japan is now faced with increasing Allied naval, land and air forces in all areas from India to the Aleutian Islands and the absolute limitations of her shipping position are never likely to increase. In these circumstances her strategy must be fundamentally defensive and be aimed at making her existing conquests as impregnable as possible.
>
> LAND FORCES: Discounting Sumatra Islands there is a maximum of 200,000 troops in deployment over a lateral distance of 3,000 miles in the South and South-West Pacific areas. It is probable that only 9 out of 13 divisions forming Japan's strategic reserve could be made available for these areas. Even discounting shipping losses, which might be heavy, previous experience indicates that it would take 9 months to concentrate in the SWPA these 9 divisions.
>
> Against this there are the equivalent of 11 Allied divisions in Australia, and 3 and 2/3rd divisions in New Guinea. There are some 11 equivalent divisions in the South Pacific area. Five Australian divisions are being trained in jungle warfare and 2 further American divisions are being sent to reinforce the SWPA in the next 5 months. There is thus a marked superiority in Allied strengths and there should be sufficient land forces for the capture of Rabaul and a subsequent advance on Truk, apart from the security of our own bases.

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[1] Maj-Gen A. S. Allen, CB, CBE, DSO, VD. (1st AIF: 13 and 45 Bns.) Comd 16 Bde 1939-41; GOC 7 Div 1941-42; Comd NT Force 1943-44. Accountant; of Sydney; b. Hurstville, NSW, 10 Mar 1894.

AIR FORCES: Japanese air forces in the SWPA are only maintained at their present level with difficulty. Even excluding air forces in the South Pacific, the Allied strength guarding Australia and in the SWPA is already considerably in excess of the total Japanese strength there and by the end of the year will be nearly three times as great.

The American Joint Staff planners had outlined a plan for an advance into the islands of the Arafura Sea south-west of New Guinea as well as the thrusts on the north coast aimed ultimately at Rabaul. However, in a report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff, dated 23rd May 1943, they recommended that "because of the limitation of forces, operations (in the Netherlands East Indies) other than air warfare should be restricted to the seizure of those islands necessary to the capture of New Guinea". An airfield was to be established on the coast of south-west New Guinea (at Merauke) as a first step in the seizure of the Aru and possibly the Tanimbar Islands in the Arafura Sea. As the advance continued along the north New Guinea coast so Allied forces on the southern New Guinea front would move forward into the Maccleur Gulf and Ambon Island.

Earlier, MacArthur had given some thought to an advance into the Netherlands East Indies, including Borneo and Celebes, but concluded that the depth to which enemy land forces were disposed there, combined with "close" waters in which both enemy navy and shore-based aircraft would operate, provided the enemy with the geographical requirements for strong defences. By contrast, operations on the northern coast of New Guinea could take advantage of the more open waters where Allied seapower could be used to more advantage.

In June 1943 no immediate seaborne assault on the islands of the Arafura Sea was being considered, but MacArthur planned to use the squadrons in the Northern Territory to aid the main New Guinea actions. The task of R.A.A.F. Command would be to pin down a considerable enemy air force which might otherwise be sent to reinforce the north New Guinea front. For as long as possible the enemy was to be confused as to the direction which the main Allied thrusts would take, and a "show of force" from the Northern Territory would add to the enemy's confusion. Developing the tactics to be followed in the campaign by North-Western Area, General Kenney wrote to Air Vice-Marshal Bostock on 20th May:

Allied Air Force operations instructions have indicated the inauguration of offensive operations in the New Guinea theatre. These operations will continue and increase in scope during the balance of this year. Analysis of enemy intentions has shown an uncertainty in his mind as to just where the expected Allied counter offensive will begin and when. In order to assist the New Guinea offensive and to further increase confusion in the enemy's plans you will take the necessary measures to increase the show of force in Northwestern Area.

The increase in bombardment strength in the Northwestern Area of both R.A.A.F. and Fifth Air Force units will be sufficient to permit periodic demonstrations likely to impress the enemy that large reinforcements have been made available in that area. His present ability to retaliate rests principally on the aerodromes at Koepang and Kendari. These bases, coupled with Ambon and Babo, represent the natural

objectives we would have if an actual offensive were being launched from Darwin. It is desired therefore that you concentrate your strength against these four major bases with particular emphasis on Koepang.

If Koepang can be eliminated as an air operating base for major staging by the enemy, the Japanese must centre additional effort on developing the Kendari, Ambon and Babo areas. This is what we desire to do in assisting the New Guinea action. It is suggested that for this purpose bombardment be concentrated in strikes of large numbers of aircraft repeated as availability permits. The impression of strength should not be reduced by utilising single ship or weak formations; nor should our efforts be expended on the minor targets surrounding Darwin. These minor targets will collapse of their own weight if the major bases are seriously hampered. Target material such as Surabaya can be profitably developed.

It is requested that you institute a plan for carrying out such a program during June and July, with maximum effort during the first part of July.

Kenney's instructions were repeated in an order by Bostock to North-Western Area. Bostock also directed North-Eastern Area to support North-Western Area in the show of force by sending the Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons to bomb targets in the Babo and Ambon areas.

As directed by Kenney, the Allied squadrons in North-Western Area during June continued their attacks on enemy airfields with emphasis on Koepang. The Japanese were still reinforcing their bases north of Darwin and reports constantly reached the area command describing the development of airfields and the apparent increase in aircraft strength.

Four Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron raided Taberfane on 4th June in an attempt to destroy enemy float-planes. When they arrived it was evident that the enemy had had warning of their approach because the Japanese aircraft were in the air and a fight developed in which both sides suffered damage. The Beaufighters destroyed one float-plane.

On 11th June fifteen Liberators of No. 528 American Squadron, newly arrived in the area, went during daylight to bomb Koepang and their attack left a large area of the town in flames. This was one of the heaviest raids on Koepang up to that time. Zekes intercepted and dropped phosphorus bombs in mid-air. One Liberator landed on the water and blew up, killing the crew.

Operating through Millingimbi on 12th June the Beaufighters went again to Taberfane. To guard against interception, three of the Beaufighters remained at 4,000 feet over the target while four more machines attacked the float-planes.[2] The pilots were also ordered not to stay too long in the area dog-fighting with enemy float-planes. The raid was a great success. The attacking Beaufighters approached the float-planes at tree-top height and caught the enemy by surprise destroying seven aircraft and damaging two. They went on to machine-gun Taberfane village. One of

[2] Members of the crews which participated in this raid were—Sqn Ldr J. L. Stanley (Brisbane); F-Lt O. H. McCutcheon (Glen Iris, Vic); F-Os J. M. Forbes (Cowandilla, SA), K. N. MacDonald (Hawthorn, Vic), F. J. Magee (Coogee, NSW), R. Ogden (Yarraville, Vic); P-O's G. D. Erwin (Yan Yan Gurt, Vic), E. V. C. B. Hunt (Mount Lawley, WA); F-Sgts J. R. Muggleton (Brighton, SA), J. G. West (Kew, Vic); and Sgts E. J. C. Barnett (Glebe Point, NSW), P. S. Lennon (Parkville, Vic), H. O. Thorncraft (Rockdale, NSW) and C. D. Wright (Buranda, Qld).

the Beaufighter pilots flew so low during the operation that the tail of his machine was damaged by trees.

Evidently the enemy considered the patrols by their float-planes in the Arafura Sea to be of great importance because they continued to maintain their base at Taberfane in spite of the mounting losses inflicted by the Beaufighters. Bladin ordered another attack against them on 22nd June using three Liberators of No. 319 Squadron as well as nine Beaufighters. Both Liberators and Beaufighters were hampered by rain and cloud and were intercepted when they reached the target. The Liberators attacked first at 3 p.m. followed by the Beaufighters at 4.35 p.m. The Beaufighters strafed nine float-planes damaging two but immediately became engaged in a fight with Japanese aircraft. Two Beaufighters which were damaged in the engagement crashed when landing at Millingimbi but the crews escaped without injury.

The enemy, nervous of a possible Allied offensive north from Darwin, continued to develop air bases. Construction work was seen on Ceram Island on 10th June. Work continued on dispersal loops and blast pens at Penfui and on a new airfield on a near-by golf course. The air route between New Britain and Ambon appeared to be complete and this would allow rapid air reinforcement either way. The enemy had also begun to build an airfield on Selaru Island, the most southerly of the Tanimbar group and only 300 miles from Darwin. A Lightning aircraft piloted by Flight Lieutenant Sinnott[3] of No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, R.A.A.F., took photographs of the island on 13th June and they showed that a clearing 5,500 feet long was being made on flat dry grass country in the centre of the island. Later in the month another reconnaissance revealed three new airstrips at Fuiloro, Timor, 380 miles from Darwin. Fuiloro and Selaru, if they became properly established would be a greater threat to Darwin than Koepang. It was essential that steps be taken to deter the Japanese from developing them.

Bladin decided to send to Selaru twelve Vultee Vengeance dive bombers of No. 12 Squadron, which up to that time had been engaged almost entirely on searches and escort duties. Although interception by enemy aircraft was not likely, six Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron were to accompany the dive bombers to protect them.

The twelve dive bombers flew from Batchelor airfield to Bathurst Island where they filled their fuel tanks. One plane could not take off from Bathurst because of electrical trouble, but the remainder, escorted by the Beaufighters, were airborne by 9.25 a.m. and headed for Selaru on the first bombing attack by Vengeances in the South-West Pacific. On arrival there they split into two sections, one led by Flight Lieutenant McPherson,[4] bombed the village of Lingat and the other, led by Flight Lieutenant Keys,[5] bombed the village of Werain. It was suspected that airfield workers

[3] Sqn Ldr P. B. Sinnott, AFC, 250837; 1 PRU. Bank clerk; of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Melbourne, 15 Jan 1918.

[4] F-Lt C. J. McPherson, 408697; 12 Sqn. Clerk; of Horsham, Vic; b. Horsham, 7 Jun 1918.

[5] Sqn Ldr J. B. Keys, 260729; 12 Sqn. Motor mechanic; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Harden, NSW, 13 Nov 1910.

would be camped in these villages. The bombs fell in the target areas and the attacks appeared to be successful although results could not easily be seen because of the dust haze caused by the explosions. A lone Japanese aircraft intercepted the dive bombers but did not open fire at any stage of the attack. Evidently it was attempting to distract the dive bomber pilots as they aimed at the target.

A Dinah reconnaissance aircraft appeared over Darwin early on 17th June flying at a height of 28,000 feet. The Dinah patrolled over airfields at Hughes, Batchelor and Coomalie, as well as Darwin. Anti-aircraft guns fired on it and forty-two Spitfires took off. Although two Spitfires saw this elusive enemy, they were unable to attack because it was some distance from them at a much greater height. A reconnaissance aircraft was the usual forerunner of an air raid on Darwin, and two days later further evidence of the intention of the enemy to raid Darwin was obtained when Intelligence intercepted enemy radio traffic indicating the arrival of a large number of aircraft at Koepang. The fighter pilots were told of probable action next day, and ground crews set to work preparing the Spitfires for the coming battle.

At 9.45 a.m. on the 20th the radar stations detected Japanese aircraft approaching Darwin. The three Spitfire squadrons were ordered to intercept and forty-six machines were airborne a few minutes later. They rendezvoused over Hughes airfield at 20,000 feet. The radio on Wing Commander Caldwell's plane failed to work and the fighter sector controller on discovering this, ordered Squadron Leader Gibbs to lead the wing, but Gibbs' engine failed and he had to return to base. Thereafter the three squadrons decided to attack independently and were led by Squadron Leader MacDonald (No. 452), and Flight Lieutenants P. H. Watson (No. 457) and Foster (No. 54).

The pilots of No. 54 Squadron were first to see the enemy bombers which were flying at 27,000 feet over Bathurst Island. Nos. 54 and 452 Squadrons dropped their auxiliary fuel tanks and attacked this enemy force soon after it crossed the coast of the mainland. No. 54 launched its attack on both bombers and escort and shot down four bombers and a fighter. Flying Officer Hughes[6] destroyed two of the bombers and Foster attacked another bomber which broke away from the formation and descended to the sea in flames. No. 452 also made a successful attack which caused the destruction of three enemy bombers. Three of No. 452 Squadron's Spitfires also engaged the fighter escort and Flying Officer Mawer[7] shot one of them down into the sea.

The enemy bombers, now reduced to fifteen, remained in formation and then turned in towards Darwin where the anti-aircraft guns opened fire. Soon after, No. 457 Squadron attacked them and destroyed another bomber which crashed in flames on Cox Peninsula. It was now 10.45 a.m.

[6] F-Lt M. C. Hughes, 42939; 115, 235, 165 and 54 Sqns RAF. Regular airman; of Penarth, Glamorganshire, Wales; b. Penarth, 18 May 1920.

[7] F-O G. A. Mawer, 403112; 245, 501 and 54 Sqns RAF, 452 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Manly, NSW; b. Canterbury, NSW, 31 Oct 1919. Killed in action 26 Sep 1943.

and the bombers' target was Winnellie where they dropped forty bombs of the "daisy-cutter" type on the air force and army camps. Three soldiers were killed and eleven wounded. Two huts and a railway truck loaded with sixty drums of oil were also destroyed and the railway line broken in three places.

After dropping their bombs the enemy planes flew across Darwin harbour. Caldwell and Group Captain Walters at this stage attacked the bombers but Caldwell was prevented by Zekes from getting close enough to fire. In the ensuing fight, however, he shot one of the Zekes into the sea. Walters opened fire on a bomber without result, but continued to follow the enemy out to sea where he caught and destroyed another Zeke.

Meanwhile at 10.55 a.m. another enemy formation of ten bombers made a tree-top level attack with bombs and cannon fire on the Darwin airfield and at Winnellie. They destroyed one building and damaged the sergeants' mess. The Japanese plan was for the low-flying bombers to make a surprise attack while the Spitfires were engaged against the high-flying machines, but it lacked coordination. However, the low-flying bombers were seen later by pilots of No. 54 Squadron, who destroyed one of them.

Two Spitfire pilots (Pilot Officers Nichterlein[8] and Ruskin-Rowe[9]) were shot down and killed during the morning's engagement, but the Spitfires had destroyed nine enemy bombers and five fighters as well as damaging another ten. For the R.A.A.F. this was the most successful encounter up to that time at Darwin. On this occasion, General MacArthur sent his congratulations for the victory which had restored confidence in the ability of the Spitfire squadrons.

In retaliation for the Japanese raid, Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron and Mitchells of No. 18 bombed Koepang and Penfui on the night of 20th-21st June. Six Catalinas of the United States Navy's No. 101 Squadron which had come up from Crawley Bay near Perth were over Penfui at midnight dropping bombs. Next day there were indications again of enemy planes near Darwin but no raid took place. It was concluded that the enemy bombers had failed to rendezvous with their fighter escorts and had then decided to abandon the raid.

On 23rd June Beaufighters visited the new enemy airfield at Selaru where they strafed two Lily bombers which caught fire and were destroyed.

Reconnaissance by Lightnings of No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit found further evidence of continued Japanese airfield construction. On Timor two new airstrips were discovered, one of 5,000 feet running parallel to the coast at Cape Chater and another at Lautem, and a total of thirty-six enemy aircraft were counted on Timor airfields. The presence of Lily bombers at Selaru indicated that the Japanese had rapidly brought this base into use as an airfield.

Nine enemy bombers escorted by nine fighters raided Darwin again on the morning of 28th June. When they were still 150 miles north-west of

[8] P-O W. E. Nichterlein, 416104; 452 Sqn. Student; of Glen Osmond, SA; b. Penshurst, Vic, 14 Feb 1920. Killed in action 20 Jun 1943.

[9] P-O A. T. Ruskin-Rowe, 411389; 131 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn. Station manager; of "Wonbobbie" and "Avoca", Warren, NSW; b. Double Bay, NSW, 4 May 1920. Killed in action 20 Jun 1943.

Darwin the radar screens detected them and two minutes later the Spitfire wing was ordered to intercept. Forty-two machines (twelve from No. 54, thirteen from No. 452 and seventeen from No. 457) took to the air. The Spitfire pilots saw the enemy near Darwin, and Caldwell ordered the anti-aircraft guns which had begun firing to cease because they would interfere with the fighter attack. However, the enemy force, after dropping a few bombs which damaged three huts and caused no casualties, turned sharply to the west, losing height and gathering speed. Nos. 54 and 452 Squadrons were unable to close with the enemy. No. 54 was diverted by a report of fighters above them. These, however, turned out to be Spitfires which had lagged behind. When the error was discovered the enemy force was from 10 to 15 miles away and the Spitfires were forced to give up the chase some 40 miles west of Cape Fourcroy.

However, No. 457 Squadron was able to attack some of the enemy. A section of three Spitfires from this squadron engaged three fighters after diving out of the sun. The enemy was evidently caught by surprise because the pilots did not attempt to evade the attack until after the Spitfires opened fire. Other Spitfires attacked the bombers, two of which were hit, while two of the Spitfires were damaged by return fire. The wing Intelligence officer assessed enemy casualties on the day as four fighters destroyed and two bombers probably destroyed. One Spitfire was destroyed as a result of a forced landing, but the pilot was uninjured.

During May and June reinforcements of Liberator bombers of the Fifth Air Force were moving into the Northern Territory to take part in the "show of force". By 1st June the headquarters of No. 380 Bombardment Group was established at Fenton, and on that date also Nos. 528 and 531 Liberator Squadrons were ready for action and were to be followed within a few days by Nos. 529 and 530 Squadrons. Kenney had passed control of the whole group to R.A.A.F. Command, and R.A.A.F. Command placed them under Bladin.

The Liberators could fly much farther than the Mitchell and Hudson bombers and were used for targets deep in Japanese-occupied territories, especially Kendari and Macassar, as well as nearer targets such as Penfui airfield. On 23rd June seventeen Liberators of No. 528 Squadron raided Macassar in daylight, losing one aircraft as a result of an enemy fighter crashing into it. Altogether during June the newly-arrived Liberator squadrons carried out fifty sorties.

Admiral Ishikawa, commander of the *23rd Air Flotilla,* organised a heavy raid against the Liberator base at Fenton on 30th June. A total of 27 Betty bombers and 23 escorting Zekes and Haps took part in this foray. Again the radar screens detected the enemy force approaching when it was still 160 miles from Darwin flying on a south-easterly course. The first "plot" was reported at 11.18 a.m. and two minutes later 38 Spitfires were ordered up to meet the coming attack. The Spitfire wing climbed in a northerly direction and when north of Sattler turned on to an easterly course. Caldwell, leading No. 457 Squadron, was in the centre, with

No. 452 on his right and No. 54 on his left flank. The ground controller now sent the wing in the direction of Batchelor which was well south of Sattler, the reason being that the enemy now appeared to be approaching the coast near Peron Island. When west of Batchelor, Caldwell saw the enemy flying eastwards towards Fenton and he ordered the wing to turn to the left taking up position abreast of the bombers and flying a parallel course in the same direction. Caldwell now told his pilots that their attack must be made in fours and sixes in line abreast followed by other sections of four or six aircraft in line abreast at intervals of 500 yards. Nos. 54 and 457 Squadrons were to attack the bombers while No. 452 was to engage the fighters.

When No. 54 Squadron reported that they were in a favourable position to attack, Caldwell gave the order and the action began. No. 54 Squadron attacked the bombers followed about thirty seconds later by No. 457. However, the leader of No. 452 had misunderstood the order and attacked the bombers instead of engaging the fighters. As a result the Spitfires were subjected to an attack by the escorts. The wing Intelligence report on this phase of the action reads:

> The result of the failure to attack the fighters and engage them whilst the bomber formation was being attacked was inevitable and our aircraft were the subject of a well concerted attack by the bombers' escort. Many of them were engaged throughout the period of their contact with the enemy by these fighters and were not able to press home further attacks on the main bomber formation and squadron and section cohesion appears to have been lost.

Soon after the Spitfire attack (12.13 p.m.) the enemy bombers turned towards Fenton which they pattern-bombed at 12.31 p.m. The anti-aircraft guns at Fenton opened fire on the enemy force which was flying at 20,000 feet but they did not hit any planes nor did they divert them from their bombing, which was accurate. The enemy bombing destroyed three Liberators of No. 380 Group on the ground, damaged another seven and caused damage to equipment and installations. Two men were slightly injured.

The Spitfires kept up the pursuit of the bomber force after it had dropped its bombs on Fenton and had turned about, making for the coast. Pilot Officer Wellsman[1] (No. 54 Squadron) was killed in the engagement. A total of 6 Spitfires were destroyed but destruction of 3 of these was due to engine failure. Enemy losses were 6 bombers and 2 fighters destroyed. Flight Sergeant Duncan[2] of No. 452 Squadron, who was forced to parachute during the engagement when his engine caught fire, spent five days in rough country until found by a rescue party. Duncan was seen by fellow pilots on 1st July and they flew out eight times during that day to keep in touch with him. On the following day more flights were made and food and cigarettes dropped to him, and contact was kept up until he was rescued on the fifth day.

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[1] P-O J. C. Wellsman, 142859 RAF; 54 Sqn RAF. Draftsman; of Twickenham, Middlesex, Eng; b. Peckham, London, 16 Jul 1921. Killed in action 30 Jun 1943.

[2] F-Lt C. R. Duncan, 401778; 452 Sqn. Building student; of Balwyn, Vic; b. St Kilda, Vic, 4 Aug 1919.

By the end of June losses of Spitfires had reduced the strength of No. 1 Fighter Wing to a low level and Bladin signalled the Chief of the Air Staff asking for the immediate dispatch of twenty-two aircraft to bring the wing up to strength. Replacement difficulties were a source of worry to the engineer officers, and training had to be cut because of the unserviceability of many aircraft. Bladin also asked that eleven new engines be flown up to replace the worn engines which the Spitfire pilots had to use in operations. Worn-out engines were causing slow speeds during battle, and formation leaders had been forced to reduce their speed in order to prevent straggling. Air force headquarters replied that up to seventeen Spitfires would arrive within a week or so. Another eighteen machines were being off-loaded in Melbourne and steps were being taken to assemble these machines in all haste. The failure of cannons and machine-guns was also reducing the effectiveness of the Spitfires. The stoppages of the weapons were usually caused by freezing of the mechanism and faults in ammunition. Steps were taken to reduce these failures.

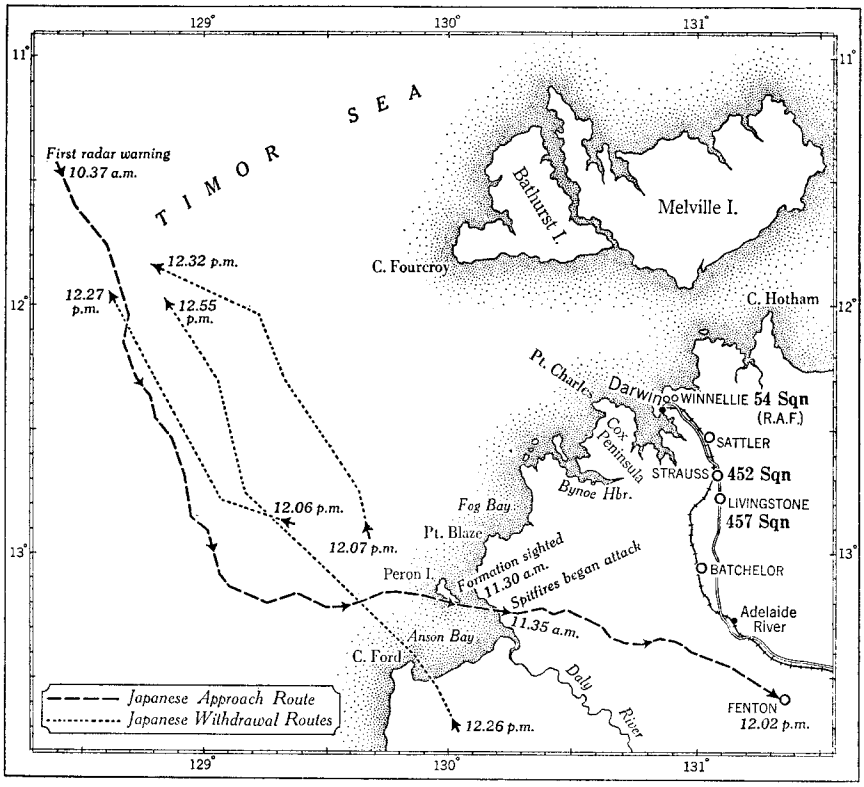
While the Spitfires fought off the enemy raiders over Fenton, Allied amphibious forces were landing in the Solomon Islands and New Guinea. Enemy retaliation to these landings took the form of air attacks of great strength in the Solomons and in the Darwin areas; there was no air opposition to the landings in New Guinea, or on Kiriwina and Woodlark Islands.

Bladin was sending more and more flights out to help keep the enemy's attention diverted from the New Guinea operations. On 30th June Mitchells, Hudsons, and American Catalinas which again came all the way from Perth for the purpose, bombed the Timor airfields. Beaufighters attacked Selaru again and the Liberators bombed Kendari. Float-planes in small formations were attempting to interfere with Allied shipping off Millingimbi early in July, but they achieved very little because of the constant cover provided by Allied aircraft.

On 3rd and 4th July a Dinah reconnaissance plane was over the Darwin area again, and on 6th July the *23rd Air Flotilla* made another raid. The radar station at Cape Fourcroy detected the attacking force at 10.37 a.m. when it was 160 miles from Darwin. The fighter controller ordered the Spitfire wing to take off and thirty-three aircraft were airborne seven minutes later. Another three machines were sent off, two to patrol at a low altitude and one to make off immediately towards the enemy force to report its direction of approach.

The three squadrons rendezvoused over Sattler at 6,000 feet and, with Caldwell in command in the centre, were directed by the ground controller to make for Batchelor. The enemy was then approaching the coast well south of Darwin near Anson Bay at a height of 20,000 feet. The slowness of the raiders' approach indicated that the enemy aircraft were climbing, therefore the Spitfires continued to climb. When they were at 32,000 feet the Spitfire pilots saw the enemy coming towards the coast over Peron Island at a height of 29,000 feet. There were 26 enemy bombers flying in three broad V's. The larger V's were divided into three smaller

V's of three machines each. Some 21 fighters could be seen escorting them. The Spitfires were between the Japanese and their target, which seemed almost certain to be Fenton where the enemy had attacked Liberators on the ground only a week before.




Caldwell's plan was that No. 452 Squadron should engage the fighter escort and No. 54 Squadron make the first attack against the bombers from head-on while No. 457 remained in reserve, flying on a parallel course to the enemy and 7,000 feet above, where it could see what was happening and take advantage of the battle situation as it developed.

At 11.35 a.m. shortly after the enemy force crossed the mainland coast Caldwell ordered No. 452 to open the attack. The enemy fighters were now turning left and forming a defensive circle about 2,000 feet above the bombers when "white" section of No. 452, led by Flight Lieutenant Hall,[3] engaged them. These Spitfires succeeded in shooting down two enemy fighters while another seven were so diverted that they could no longer interfere with other Spitfires which were about to attack the raiding

[3] F-Lt E. S. Hall, 403013; 129 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn. Grazier; of Werris Creek, NSW; b. Sydney, 10 Mar 1918.

bombers. However three Spitfires were lost. Flight Lieutenant Makin[4] made a forced landing when his engine failed and Sergeant Richardson[5] parachuted when his also failed. Flying Officer Lloyd,[6] hit by enemy fire, was also forced to parachute.

Meanwhile, Squadron Leader Gibbs, leading No. 54, had begun his attack on the bombers, although three of his Spitfires were unable to keep up with the others, because of the poor state of their engines, and did not engage in the first attack. After six months' tropical service coupled with rapid climbs the engines were fast approaching a critical period in their flying life and were passing the limit of efficiency. Gibbs reported later that this position had "assumed a serious aspect quite suddenly because of the greatly increased activity of the enemy in this sector during the past few weeks". As a result, only 7 Spitfires of No. 54 engaged the bomber force of 27 enemy machines. They shot down 4 and damaged 2, while 2 of the Spitfires were lost.

No. 457 meanwhile had held its attack and followed the enemy bombers towards Fenton. About twenty miles from Fenton, Caldwell ordered two sections (eight aircraft) of this squadron to attack. Both sections were engaged by enemy fighters but the Spitfires succeeded in shooting down two bombers. However, three Spitfire pilots (Flying Officers Hamilton and Robinson[7] and Pilot Officer McDowell) were shot down and killed.

By midday twenty machines of the enemy bomber force were over Fenton and dropped 140 bombs on the Liberator dispersal area in spite of anti-aircraft guns which fired eighty-eight rounds at them without effect. The enemy bombs destroyed one Liberator, damaged three others, and damaged anti-aircraft guns and the airfield. The Spitfires continued to attack through the anti-aircraft fire and another bomber was shot down almost over the gunners' heads. At this stage Caldwell gave permission to Squadron Leader James to attack, but James was thwarted by four enemy fighters and forced to dive down to 15,000 feet. He climbed again to make another attack, but was again diverted by two enemy fighters. The bomber force was now making for the coast and Caldwell made a lone head-on attack on a bomber just as it was crossing the coast. When pulling up again Caldwell was engaged by one of the escorts. Another two fighters turned in towards him and because his oxygen supply had been exhausted he took evasive action and returned to base. Another pilot (Pilot Officer R. W. Watson) followed the enemy twenty miles out to sea and succeeded in damaging a bomber.

After these losses Bladin again signalled to Air Force headquarters that it was "imperative that all Spitfires allotted this area from southern sources be delivered immediately". However, the raid of 6th July was the

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[4] F-Lt P. St J. Makin, 116507 RAF; 452 Sqn. Student; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 22 Oct 1920.

[5] F-O A. R. Richardson, 411644; 167 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Hamilton, NSW; b. Hamilton, 10 Jan 1920.

[6] F-Lt C. P. Lloyd, 404690; 452 Sqn. Grazier; of Roma, Qld; b. Kyneton, Vic, 3 Jan 1918.

[7] F-O N. F. Robinson, 401284; 457 Sqn. Student; of Toorak, Vic; b. Hawthorn, Vic, 23 Jun 1922. Killed in action 6 Jul 1943.

last to be made in strength over the Darwin area, and within a few days more Spitfires began to arrive from the south.

Meanwhile Mitchells, Hudsons, and Liberators raided airfields at Penfui, Cape Chater, Babo, Nabire, Fuiloro and Selaru. On 6th July five Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron led by Flight Lieutenant Austin bombed Koepang town at night. The following night Austin led seven more Hudsons against grounded aircraft on the near-by Penfui airfield. The bombing caused many fires, but there was no proof that enemy aircraft had been destroyed.

Next day the Liberators of No. 380 Group, which had suffered losses from the bombs of the Japanese raiders at Fenton on 30th June and 6th July, replied by sending 9 aircraft against Penfui in daylight. Only 6 of the Liberators reached the target and they were immediately engaged by 10 to 14 Zekes, of which 3 were shot down. Hazy photographs taken at Penfui showed that 13 Betty bombers were parked on the airfield, indicating that the Japanese, in spite of the constant bombing, were still able to maintain bombers at this advanced base.

On 10th July a Liberator was lost when Zekes intercepted a flight of Liberators of No. 531 Squadron which raided Babo. The Liberators bombed Macassar in Celebes on 18th July, and on 22nd July made their first raid on a target in Java, bombing Surabaya, where they damaged oil refineries and docks.

In order to reach Surabaya, the Liberators staged through the Western Area base at Corunna Downs, some miles inland from Port Hedland. This base was the closest point to Surabaya from Australia, and Allied aircraft operating from it were able to give a wide berth to the many enemy fighter bases on Timor and other islands between Darwin and Java. Late in 1942 a party of thirteen R.A.A.F. men under Flying Officer Sutton[8] had arrived at Corunna Downs and formed an operational base unit there. In later months civilian workers directed by the Allied Works Council built a bitumen-surfaced airstrip. Fuel, bombs and ammunition were stored at the base for use by staging aircraft.

This airfield was on an iron ridge surrounded by flat spinifex country. It was only 30 miles from Marble Bar, reputedly the hottest town in Australia; temperatures of 120 degrees are commonplace in this area and the men at the base suffered severely from the heat. There were few amenities. The food was mostly tinned and this caused the health of the men to suffer.

No. 31 Squadron during July carried out convoy-escort duties as well as attacking such enemy bases as Selaru airfield and the float-plane base at Taberfane. Several times during the month bad weather frustrated attempts to attack the float-planes. On 24th July twelve Beaufighters flew from Coomalie Creek to Taberfane to make an attack. Rain squalls and heavy cloud prevented effective action, as the rain on the windshields had made it impossible to shoot accurately, but four enemy aircraft were damaged. When the Beaufighters arrived at the base four of the

[8] F-Lt L. V. Sutton, 294443; comd OBU Corunna Downs 1942-43. Trust officer; of South Perth, WA; b. Perth, 17 Dec 1904.

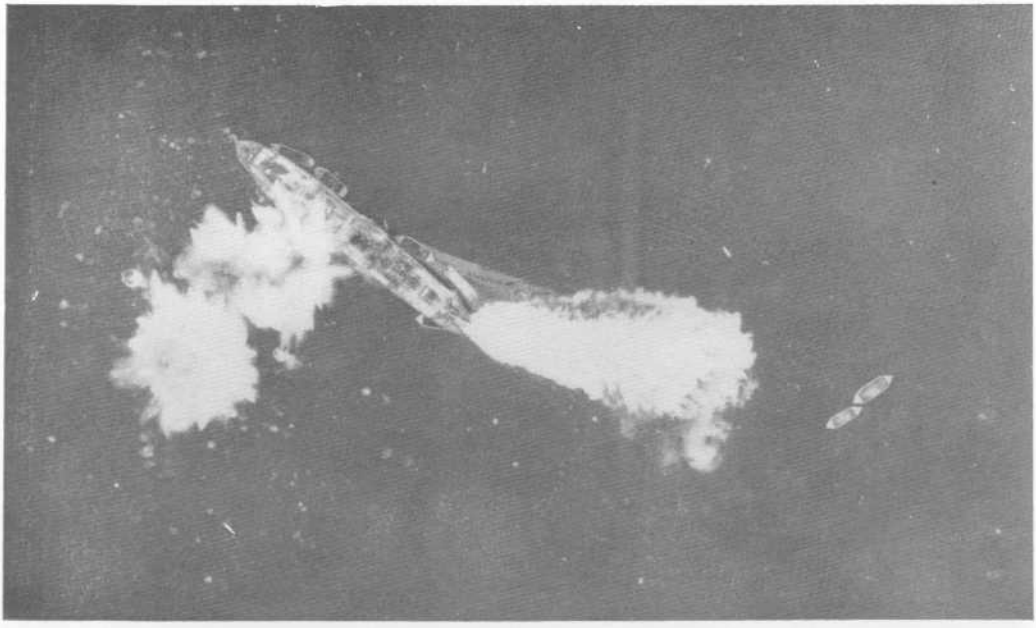


Rabaul ablaze on 2nd November 1943. Two Mitchell aircraft can be seen through the smoke at top left. *(R.A.A.F.)*



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Beaufighter crews of No. 30 Squadron being "debriefed" by the Intelligence Officer at Goodenough Island in October 1943 after a big raid on Rabaul. The Intelligence Officer, F-Lt H. J. Ellis, is holding a pencil; opposite him with his hand over his face, F-Sgt. C. Harris; F-Lt K. Barber points to the map. Behind the table Sqn Ldr F. R. Maguire, leaning forward; F-O A. F. Catt, partly obscured; and W Cdr J. G. Emerton holding a cigarette.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A freighter-transport near Pomelaa, Celebes, under attack by aircraft of the American No. 380 Heavy Bombardment Group on 21st August 1943.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Beauforts of Nos. 6, 8, and 100 Squadrons bombing a camp area at Amgen River, near Lindenhafen, on 17th January 1944.



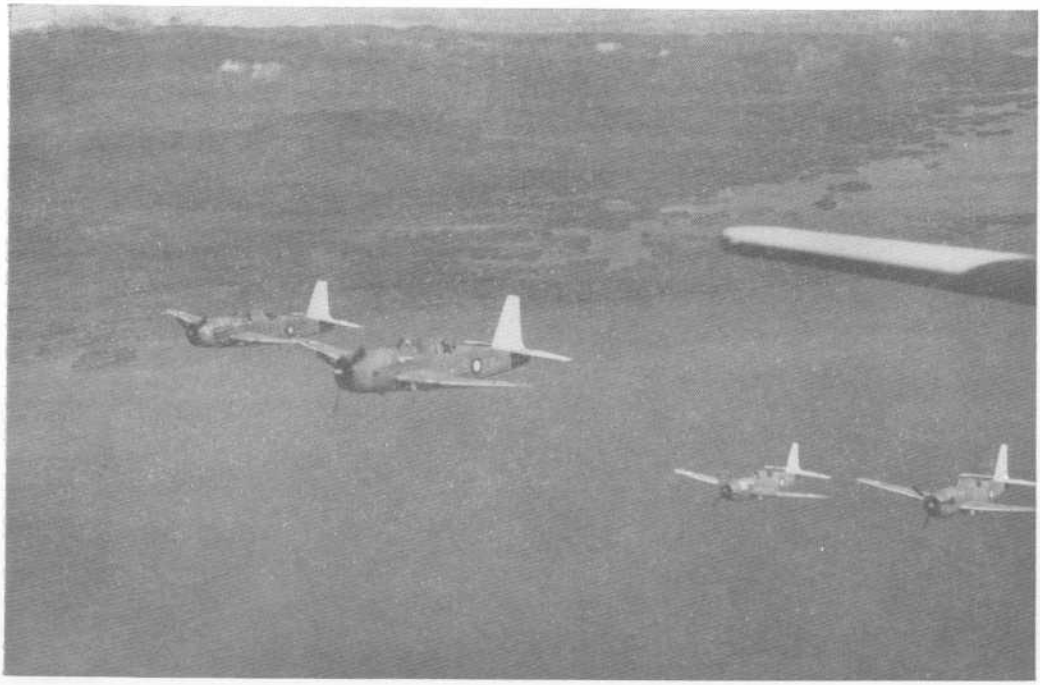
*(R.A.A.F.)*

A Beaufort of No. 1 Squadron leaving the target area at Su, in Dutch Timor, on 19th April 1944, after a successful raid by a mixed force from Nos. 1, 18, and 31 Squadrons.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A ground crew at Kiriwina take shelter from one of the sudden tropical downpours under the wing of the Kittyhawk they are servicing, in February 1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Vultee Vengeance dive bombers of No. 24 Squadron returning from a raid on Alexishafen airstrip on 27th February 1944.

enemy aircraft were in the air and another took off. Enemy fire damaged two Beaufighters before they set course for Millingimbi where they were to refuel, while one Beaufighter (Flying Officers Gillespie[9] and Cameron[1]) did not return and was presumed lost.

[9] F-O B. W. Gillespie, 406842; 31 Sqn. Insurance officer; of Nedlands, WA; b. North Fremantle, WA, 11 Jul 1922. Killed in action 24 Jul 1943.

[1] F-O A. J. Cameron, 1424, 7169; 31 Sqn. Regular airman; of Watson's Bay, NSW; b. Waverley, NSW, 4 Jan 1914. Killed in action 24 Jul 1943.

CHAPTER 5

# AIR SUPPORT DURING THE LAE-NADZAB-FINSCHHAFEN OPERATIONS

IN the South-West Pacific, the first stage of the ELKTON offensive had met with success and General MacArthur was now ready to push on with the second stage—the seizure of the Markham Valley, Lae, Salamaua and Finschhafen. His senior commanders had been ordered to prepare for this operation by a warning instruction issued on 6th May. He had directed General Blamey to group the five Australian divisions which were to take part into New Guinea Force, and General Krueger, commander of the Sixth American Army, to organise American troops into New Britain Force for the subsequent attack on western New Britain. Blamey was also later given an American parachute regiment (the 503rd) which was to jump into the Markham Valley behind Lae from transport aircraft and seize ground suitable for use as an airfield. When the airfield was ready, the 7th Australian Division would be flown in by air transports and attack the enemy at Lae from the west, while the 9th Australian Division attacked the enemy along the coast of Huon Gulf.

General Kenney's squadrons had been directed to support the troops by intensive air bombardment of Lae and Salamaua before and during their movement in landing craft along the New Guinea coast from Buna. In addition to directly supporting the Australian troops in the battles that lay ahead, the air forces were to blockade the Huon Gulf. No. 9 Operational Group would contribute by hammering the enemy bases, particularly air bases in western New Britain, and sinking barges, submarines or other Japanese vessels that attempted to carry reinforcements or supplies to the Japanese in the gulf area. As far as possible, the enemy forces in Lae were to be cut off from their main rear bases, and then destroyed by the Australian infantry. No. 4 Squadron, still engaged in the fighting round Komiatum and Salamaua, was given the task of observing enemy ground defences, artillery spotting and generally aiding the army during the campaign; and later No. 24 Squadron, armed with the new Vultee Vengeance dive bombers, was given the task of directly supporting the Australians.

Before the campaign began, further movements of No. 9 Group's units were to take place. General Kenney informed Air Vice-Marshal Bostock in June that, because of their nearness to each other, Goodenough Island and Milne Bay formed an "inter-linking defensive area", and he proposed that these bases be manned by R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons, and combined into an R.A.A.F. fighter area. Kenney said that these advanced areas were primarily directed against Rabaul. At the same time, further offensive action was to be taken against Wewak. Kenney proposed to use three, and possibly six, squadrons of the new Lightning aircraft to escort bombers

in these operations, because they were the most efficient machine for this purpose. The new No. 475 Fighter Group of the Fifth Air Force was then being equipped with Lightnings and would be available. If the R.A.A.F. manned Kiriwina with three fighter squadrons, Goodenough with two and Milne Bay with one, the Lightnings would be free for these operations.

These proposals called for two additional R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons for No. 9 Group, but Bostock informed Kenney on 17th June that, owing to shortages of men and aircraft, the R.A.A.F. could not supply them, and therefore the group could not accept the whole of this responsibility. Another squadron of Kittyhawks (No. 78) would be sent to New Guinea by October, but no further squadrons could be made available for some time. It therefore became necessary to use two American fighter squadrons to fill the gap.

On 30th July, Air Commodore Hewitt ordered Nos. 76, 77, and 79 Squadrons to move to Kiriwina by 15th August. The general control of all air units at both Goodenough and Kiriwina, including the supply of oil, petrol and bombs, was vested in No. 9 Group. No. 71 Wing was responsible for Goodenough and No. 73 Wing, which was to move from Port Moresby, for Kiriwina. Other units to move to Kiriwina were No. 46 Operational Base Unit and No. 6 Mobile Works Squadron. Small landing craft, and three transport aircraft supplied by the Directorate of Air Transport, carried the units from Goodenough to Kiriwina.

In contrast with Goodenough, which was mountainous, Kiriwina was flat, with coral cliffs reaching nowhere higher than 100 feet. There were about 8,000 natives who lived on taro, bananas, paw paws, pineapples and other crops grown on the rich soil of the island, in addition to rations brought from the south.

Why the enemy did not send bombers to Kiriwina in August and September to interfere with its development was mystifying to the Allies. Development proceeded practically unhindered, although heavy rain, unexpected difficulties with roads, and the slow arrival of heavy mechanical equipment delayed work on the airfield. However, the first Douglas transport landed on 2nd August and soon afterwards the R.A.A.F. began to move in. No. 6 Mobile Construction Squadron arrived on 3rd August to aid the Sixth Army engineers and began building camps, workshops and roads. Between 9th and 18th August, No. 79 Squadron arrived, and by 19th August, the Spitfires were ready to take the air against the enemy. The move of No. 77 Squadron was deferred because at the time there were not enough dispersal facilities. The squadron's transfer was cancelled altogether at a later stage because No. 78 Squadron was coming up from the mainland and it would save a double move if that squadron were to go direct to Kiriwina instead of taking the place of No. 77 Squadron when it moved to Kiriwina from Goodenough. By 17th August, 1,556 R.A.A.F. men had arrived at Kiriwina and at Goodenough the strength was 2,760. The movement of No. 76 Squadron was also delayed but it became operational at the new base on 10th September.

At Rabaul General Imamura had realised in May 1943 that the position of his ground forces in New Guinea was becoming acute. He was aware of the big concentrations of Allied shipping in Milne Bay and at Buna, and assumed that the Allies, taking advantage of the fact that much of the Japanese air and naval strength was engaged in the Solomons, would attack his New Guinea garrison.

Headquarters in Tokyo had suggested to General Imamura and Admiral Kusaka that the naval air force should remain to defend Rabaul and that the army air force should move its headquarters and squadrons to New Guinea and operate there in support of the ground forces. Imamura considered this arrangement would be better than having army and navy aircraft striking at the same targets and ordered the *Fourth Air Army* with its 10,000 aircrew and ground staff to move to Wewak. This order had been carried out by August 1943. The *6th Air Division,* with five fighter and three bomber groups, totalling 324 aircraft was established at Wewak, and the *7th Air Division* with a total of 156 aircraft established its main strength at But, a few miles farther along the north New Guinea coast. One-third of the *7th Division's* strength remained at Ambon and other airfields in that area.

The movement of these enemy aircraft to Wewak and near-by airfields had been observed by Kenney's reconnaissance aircraft and he ordered the Fifth Air Force to attack the Wewak airfields in great strength. The attacking aircraft used Marilinan airfield, forty miles from Lae, which had just been completed for use in the Huon Gulf campaign.[1] Forty-seven Liberator and Flying Fortress bombers began the attacks in the early hours of 17th August against some 200 enemy aircraft at Wewak, Dagua, Boram and But airfields. They caught the aircraft parked wing-tip to wing-tip on runways. At Boram sixty fighters and bombers were being warmed up with their crews in their places ready for take off. Some Japanese pilots tried to get into the air but were hit and burned with their aircraft. These attacks were followed at 9 a.m. by low-level bombing and strafing by Mitchell bombers protected by fighters. Only three bombers were lost and the raiders destroyed 100 enemy aircraft and large quantities of supplies, and inflicted casualties. From the scene of devastation revealed in photographs taken during and after these attacks it was clear to Kenney that his aircrews had delivered a highly-successful blow.

After the war Major-General Tanikawa of the *Fourth Air Army,* when questioned about this raid, said:

> At the time of the air attacks on Wewak on 17th and 18th August our defences were not alert. We lost 100 planes including light bombers, fighters and reconnaissance planes. It was a decisive Allied victory. We were planning to regain the balance of air power and were making plans to bomb Port Moresby and other areas. A few days before our projected plan was to materialise, we were bombed at Wewak and our air power was severely crippled. Consequently our air power was rapidly diminishing and was unable to aid our ground forces effectively which, in the end, constituted one of our chief reasons for losing the war.

[1] Marilinan airfield site was chosen by General Savige to protect the flank of 3 Aust Div, after the area had been discovered during a fine 19-day patrol by 24 Bn AIF. This information was enthusiastically received by General Kenney and work on the airfield began immediately.

The Japanese considered that their high losses on the ground were due to inability to disperse their aircraft over a wide enough area, and this in turn to lack of machinery and heavy equipment at forward bases. During this period no fewer than 50 per cent of their aircraft losses were aircraft caught and destroyed on the ground. Many of them could not leave the ground because there was not enough maintenance staff to keep the aircraft in flying condition.[2]

In planning the Huon Gulf campaign General MacArthur assigned the blockade of the battle area as one of the principal tasks of his air and naval forces. The Australian squadrons in July and August were contributing to this purpose by their attacks on enemy communications between Rabaul and New Guinea. The Japanese were using large numbers of 50-foot barges along the coasts of New Britain, and across Vitiaz Strait to Finschhafen and Lae. Forty of these craft and fifteen smaller ones were capable of transporting 1,050 troops with guns, ammunition, fuel, food and water. At concealed staging points, 40 to 70 miles apart, the Japanese hid the barges under the low-hanging trees or bushes which fringed river mouths and harbours. Each barge carried a crew of seven men including four gunners who manned machine-guns and small cannon. In July, Allied reconnaissance had shown 300 barges in eastern New Guinea and western New Britain and it was assumed that the total in these areas was considerably more since many would be hidden from view during the day.

Kittyhawk pilots of No. 77 Squadron attacked five Japanese barges on 2nd August during a sweep along the south coast of New Britain between Gasmata and Jacquinot Bay, destroyed three and damaged two. Eighteen Kittyhawks took part in this sweep, led by Flight Lieutenant Sproule, who had been appointed to command the squadron the day before. When making a daring low-level attack near the Lindenhafen plantation, Sproule's Kittyhawk was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crash-landed on the beach. Sproule was missing when Bostons of No. 22 Squadron returned to the area in the afternoon and destroyed the crashed aircraft.

Nos. 22 and 30 Squadrons, now well established at Vivigani airfield, which had become the forward headquarters of No. 9 Operational Group, were directed to join in the attack on enemy barge traffic. The fire power of both Beaufighters and Bostons, especially the Beaufighters with their 20-mm cannon, made them well suited to this task and they were aided by the capture of a Japanese map of New Britain showing barge routes and hiding places. On 11th August three Bostons, in a sweep between Awul and Cape Bali, landed a bomb on the stern of a barge and left three others unserviceable. Barges, buildings and anti-aircraft positions near Palmalmal plantation were attacked by Beaufighters on 14th August, while the Bostons swept the area from Cape Bali to Gasmata. On 19th August, Beaufighters found two barges moored side by side to the jetty

[2] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol II, p. 404: Colonel Kaneko.

at Kalai plantation in Wide Bay. The barges were camouflaged with green foliage. The Beaufighters attacked and flames were seen coming from the barges. Altogether, during August, No. 30 Squadron, in addition to damaging ground targets, destroyed or damaged forty-one vessels. The squadron had adopted the tactics of using two Beaufighters to sweep an allotted part of the coast. The leading aircraft followed the outline of the coast at a height of about thirty feet and from 100 to 200 yards from the shore. From that height and position the observer could search for barges drawn in close to the shore and hidden under overhanging trees; all rivers were searched upstream as far as barges could go. The second aircraft followed the first at a height of 1,000 feet, and about 1,000 yards behind. From this position it could keep a lookout towards the sea and guard against attack by enemy fighters. At the same time it was in a good position to dive down and join the leader when a barge was found. Most missions were carried out at first light when the element of surprise was at its greatest, and occasionally sweeps were made on moonlit nights.

Both Bostons and Beaufighters returned to the attack on the Gasmata airfield on 23rd August. The Beaufighters were to strafe aircraft on the ground and installations, but saw no serviceable aircraft or enemy troops. They therefore fired their cannon and machine-guns at an anti-aircraft position and at the airfield area generally. Flight Lieutenant Craig, who led the Bostons, decided not to bomb the airfield because, to him also, it appeared unusable. He led them against the dump area where they dropped their bombs apparently to good effect.

The Bostons and Beaufighters attacked Gasmata again on 25th August, and on 29th August six aircraft from No. 22 Squadron took off from Vivigani to attack dumps at the mouth of the Anwek River and six Beaufighters found two barges side by side off Cape Beechey. After they attacked they saw one blow up and the other suffer damage. The Bostons scored a direct hit on a gun position south-west of Anwek River and were themselves fired on by anti-aircraft weapons which damaged three aircraft. A Boston piloted by Flying Officer Young[3] had the hydraulic line shot out and the fuselage, tail and fin holed, and crash-landed at Vivigani. Flight Lieutenant Sladen's machine was also hit in the fuselage and a splinter from it wounded him in the back.

Except for No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, no Australian squadron took part in the ground campaign around Salamaua after the withdrawal of Nos. 22 and 30 Squadrons from Port Moresby and their transfer to Vivigani, but Fifth Air Force squadrons continued to pound enemy positions as the Australians and Americans advanced towards Salamaua. The 17th Australian Brigade captured Komiatum on 16th August and a battalion of the 162nd U.S. Regiment occupied near-by Mount Tambu on 19th August. By the beginning of September, Japanese

[3] F-Lt A. C. Young, DFC, 406671; 22 Sqn. Farmer; of Aldersyde, WA; b. Cottesloe, WA, 3 May 1916. Killed in aircraft accident 10 Nov 1944.

resistance round Salamaua had been broken, and the Australians were ready for a final thrust into the wrecked town itself.

While the 3rd Australian Division and part of the 162nd Regiment were dealing with the enemy battalions at Salamaua, the 9th Australian Division had been embarked at Milne Bay for the amphibious assault on Lae, and the 7th Division was practising emplaning in air transports at Port Moresby ready for the invasion of the Markham Valley. The first objective in the campaign was the seizure of airfields, and this would be followed by the expulsion of the Japanese from the entire Huon Gulf area, enabling the Allies to dominate Vitiaz Strait between New Britain and New Guinea.

On 30th August, MacArthur set the day for the landing—4th September. While the Australian army busily prepared for the operation, the Fifth Air Force intensified its bombardments of targets at Lae, Finschhafen, Alexishafen, and Wewak. It had the main responsibility for air support of the landing, and also sent some of its bombers to aid the Australian squadrons attacking New Britain. The Australian squadrons increased their efforts in the air offensive, which was designed to so weaken the enemy in the air and on the ground, that he would be an easy prey to the attacking infantry.

On 1st September, No. 30 Squadron put all their available aircraft into the air. Led by Wing Commander Glasscock, twelve machines carried out a barge sweep from Cape Archway to Awul where a number of barges had been seen by a patrolling Catalina. They strafed three barges near Kalai plantation, leaving two burning, while another barge was left burning at Brown Island. A fuel dump near the jetty at Kalai was set on fire and an anti-aircraft gun silenced at Palmalmal. Return fire from the enemy damaged two of the Beaufighters.

The Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron continued their daily searches for enemy submarines in the area through which the Lae convoy was passing, and the Australian Kittyhawk pilots stood by at Milne Bay, and Goodenough Island, ready to give fighter protection if called on.

The day before the Lae landing Glasscock's Beaufighters swept New Britain waters again, attacking barges. Squadron Leader Atherton,[4] commander of No. 75 Squadron, on this day—the eve of the landing—was instructed to take photographs of Gasmata because it was feared that the Japanese might use the airfield there as a staging base for air attacks on the assault convoy. Atherton flew a specially-equipped Lightning fighter, a number of which had been allotted to No. 75 Squadron for reconnaissance purposes, but his camera failed to work and he returned without the photographs.

Japanese naval air strength at Rabaul, with that at Wewak, was the chief threat to the 9th Division's convoy now approaching the beaches at Lae. Earlier, General Kenney had told General MacArthur that he did not have sufficient air strength to handle the enemy aircraft both at Wewak

[4] W Cdr G. C. Atherton, 408030. 25 and 24 Sqns; comd 75 Sqn 1943, 82 Sqn 1943-44, 78 Wing 1944-45, 8 OTU 1945. Accountant: of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 27 Sep 1919.

and Rabaul, and that he proposed concentrating everything on Wewak right up to the date of the landing.[5] He had been very successful in destroying enemy air power at Wewak, but his plan to ignore Rabaul was a risk which was received in some quarters with misgiving. However, Kenney used up considerable effort in keeping western New Britain airfields out of commission and this would interfere with enemy Rabaul-based fighters operating in the Huon Gulf area. On the eve of the landing reconnaissance aircraft reported the Cape Gloucester airfield in order and Kenney dispatched twenty-one bombers against it on 2nd September and again on the 3rd.

That night all available Australian Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons made harassing attacks on Lakunai and Vunakanau airfields at Rabaul where a total of 200 enemy aircraft had been counted. (The Catalinas had been engaged in minelaying operations in the Netherlands Indies but this work was interrupted for the Rabaul operation.) On the morning of 3rd September, five Catalinas of No. 11, led by Wing Commander Green, and four from No. 20, led by Wing Commander Stilling,[6] took off from Cairns harbour. They were heavily loaded with bombs and their orders were to refuel at Milne Bay and then strike at Japanese aircraft on the airfields and in dispersal bays, prolonging their attacks for as long as possible so as to disturb the sleep and nerves of the enemy. Stilling arrived over the target first and dropped his bombs across the centre of the Vunakanau airfield. The defenders were caught unawares and his machine was not fired on by anti-aircraft weapons. However, the defences were thoroughly alert when Squadron Leader Vernon, who attacked Lakunai airfield in a gliding approach from 10,000 to 5,500 feet, came in to attack. His Catalina was illuminated by a searchlight immediately he passed over Rabaul town, and within a few seconds eight other searchlights flashed on to his Catalina. Anti-aircraft weapons then opened fire and the searchlights held the aircraft as it attempted to bomb the target, dazzling the crew. Vernon and his crew escaped, however, and his bombs fell south-east of the town area. Three of the Catalina force bombed Vunakanau, and another attacked Rapopo airfield because clouds hid Vunakanau when it reached Rabaul.

On 4th September naval guns struck first at the Lae beach defences near Hopoi, and at 6.30 a.m. the 20th Australian Brigade landed without opposition except from seven light bombers which attacked the landing craft half an hour later, followed by twenty bombers which scored hits on escorting naval vessels. The absence of strong and sustained enemy air opposition indicated the success of Kenney's efforts to isolate the battle area.

While American bombers struck along the beach near the landing area at 7.30 a.m., ten Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron and three Bostons of No. 22 continued the bombardment and machine-gunning of Gasmata airfield to make sure that the enemy could not use it for staging attacks

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[5] *General Kenney Reports*, p. 274.

[6] W Cdr S. G. Stilling, DFC, 39579 RAF. 205 Sqn RAF; comd 20 Sqn 1943. Regular air force offr; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 16 Jan 1912. Killed in action 1 Oct 1943.

against the Australian infantry. The Beauforts dropped twenty-two bombs on the runway, some of which were set to explode after 6, 12 and 36 hours' delay, and the Bostons followed with demolition bombs which they dropped from low levels. The enemy replied with anti-aircraft weapons and shot down a Beaufort, killing the crew.

Throughout 4th September the men of the 9th Division met no opposition from the Japanese troops round Lae, but early that afternoon the Japanese naval air service sent 18 light bombers, and 58 fighters of the *25th* and *26th Air Flotillas* from Rabaul, to raid Allied shipping in the Huon Gulf.

At 1 p.m. the *Reid,* a unit of the 5th American Destroyer Squadron which had been stationed off Finschhafen to locate raiding aircraft with radar equipment, detected aircraft flying over the spine of New Britain. In charge of the fighter-director team in *Reid* was Wing Commander Conaghan[7] of No. 9 Group, who had earlier suggested this method of obtaining early warning of enemy fighter attacks on the beach-head, and the vessels offshore. The R.A.A.F. at Vivigani was warned of the approach of the enemy force, as were the Americans at Dobodura. Twenty-three aircraft of No. 76 Squadron, which was on emergency stand-by at Vivigani, took off soon afterwards, led by Wing Commander Arthur, wing leader of No. 71 Wing, but returned at 3 p.m. having failed to find the enemy aircraft despite searching for some time round Gasmata. Meanwhile three Lightning squadrons of the Fifth Air Force were directed to the enemy force by Conaghan, and a series of actions took place in which a large number of Japanese aircraft were destroyed. The enemy, however, managed to damage several L.S.T's which were off Cape Ward Hunt.

While these fights were taking place three Bostons of No. 22 Squadron again raided Gasmata dropping all their bombs on the airfield runway after which they were satisfied it could not be used by aircraft. To round off a day of intense air activity by Australian and American airmen, twelve Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron conducted a successful sweep of New Britain waters. They found and attacked no fewer than thirty Japanese barges, four of which were set alight by cannon fire. They also fired their cannon at Cape Gloucester airfield and saw a surfaced enemy submarine which crash-dived before they could attack.

The Bostons returned to Gasmata at dawn next morning and found that the enemy had carried out repair work overnight. They dropped bombs which struck the centre and eastern end of the runway where the repairs had been made. It was vital that this airfield should be kept out of action because, on this morning of 5th September, transport aircraft were to drop the American and Australian parachute landing force

[7] W Cdr H. A. Conaghan, DFC, 458. Comd 1 Fighter Sector 1942-43, 3 and 9 Fighter Sectors 1943, 109 Mobile Fighter sector 1943-44; 8 Sqn 1944-45; comd 100 Sqn 1945. Regular air force offr; of Coolangatta, Qld; b. Tweed Heads, NSW, 15 Sep 1917. Killed in aircraft accident 27 Aug 1954.

Some months later Rear-Adm Crutchley, commanding the Australian Squadron, said: "Wing Commander Conaghan has done outstanding work with the Navy in the New Guinea area, both with Fifth Destroyer Squadron and with Task Force 74. There is no doubt in my mind that the present liaison and close cooperation between the Naval and Air Forces in this area were started and have been built up largely by Conaghan."

at Nadzab, and aircraft were to set down part of the 7th Division as soon as a landing field could be made ready. Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron were therefore ordered to follow the Bostons and press home their attacks on Gasmata. Ten of them, led by Flight Lieutenant Woollacott and protected above by eight Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron, arrived on the scene just after 7 a.m. An earlier visit of the Bostons had put the enemy defences on the alert. The Beauforts had five tons of bombs to drop, and they approached in a shallow dive starting at about 3,000 feet and coming down to 1,500. This was a dangerously low level for slow aircraft, but the Australians had often bombed this airfield and had not before met strong opposition. On this day, however, the enemy was waiting and opened up with a sudden and unexpectedly heavy box-barrage. It was impossible to avoid this deadly fire, but the pilots gamely sent their Beauforts through it. Five aircraft were immediately hit. Woollacott's machine was among these, but, although it was in flames, he gallantly continued his run and his four bombs exploded on the runway. The aircraft crashed immediately, and Woollacott and his crew (Flight Sergeants Sugg[8], Williams[9] and Pedler[1]) were killed.

Smoke and flame were also pouring from Warrant Officer Wiggins'[2] Beaufort and it crashed into the sea; and a third Beaufort, piloted by Flying Officer Anderson, was missing after the attack. The other aircrews believed that this aircraft crashed into the hills seven miles north-east of Gasmata where fire and smoke were seen soon afterwards. A fourth, piloted by Flying Officer Walsh[3], was badly damaged but the pilot managed to get it back to Vivigani. As a tyre had been shot away, it ground looped on landing and was destroyed. The crew, however, escaped injury. A bullet damaged the controls of Flying Officer Morton's[4] Beaufort, but he, too, managed to reach Vivigani, with the surviving members of the mission. The loss of four crews in two days and damage to other Beauforts had seriously reduced the strength of No. 100 Squadron.[5]

Later in the morning No. 30 Squadron also lost a crew when Japanese fire struck a Beaufighter piloted by Flying Officer Woodroffe[6] and navigated by Flight Sergeant Brooks[7] while it was attacking the Cape Gloucester airfield. It crashed into a hill, killing both airmen.

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[8] F-Sgt J. A. Sugg, 416085; 22 and 100 Sqns. School teacher; of Blackwood, SA; b. Wagin, WA, 8 Oct 1918. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

[9] F-Sgt H. J. Williams, 408311; 14 and 100 Sqns. Electrical mechanic; of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 20 Feb 1923. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

[1] F-Sgt W. T. Pedler, 416608. 71 Sqn, 2 Air Ambulance Unit, 100 Sqn. Farmer and grazier; of Koolunga, SA; b. Blyth, SA, 28 Jul 1922. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

[2] W-O C. B. Wiggins, 405335. 6, 7, 14 and 100 Sqns. School teacher; of Gatton, Qld; b. Gatton, 29 Mar 1915. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

[3] F-Lt C. S. Walsh, DFC, 406065; 100 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Cranbrook, NSW; b. Southern Cross, WA, 26 Apr 1912.

[4] F-Lt A. H. Morton, DFC, 406947; 100 Sqn. Student; of Trayning, WA; b. Trayning, 8 Apr 1919.

[5] W Cdr D. W. Colquhoun, reporting on this sqn to RAAF Cd on 18 Sep, wrote: "Of 14 crews, the CO is medically unfit and departing south, four have completed their operational tour and the medical officer is grounding them at the beginning of next month, four are GR trained and posted to No. 6 Squadron, which leaves five effective crews in the unit with 17 aircraft available."

[6] F-O H. M. Woodroffe, 407542; 30 Sqn. Analyst; of Mitcham, SA; b. Pt Augusta, SA, 30 Sep 1917. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

[7] F-Sgt J. L. Brooks, 43250; 30 Sqn. Stores clerk; of Warwick, Qld; b. Brisbane, 13 Feb 1923. Killed in action 5 Sep 1943.

At about 10.30 a.m., forty-eight American Mitchells, followed by Bostons, Liberators and Flying Fortresses began the bombardment of Nadzab and Heath's Plantation. A smoke screen was then laid from the air. Hidden by this screen and protected above by 146 American fighters, 96 transports flew into the valley, and from them the American 503rd Parachute Regiment, with a detachment of the 2/4th Australian Field Regiment dropped to the ground. The sappers of the 2/2nd Australian Pioneer Battalion and the 2/6th Australian Field Company, which had been flown to Tsili Tsili airfield earlier, made their way overland to the Markham River, and crossed into Nadzab as soon as they saw the paratroops land.

General Kenney, in a letter to General Arnold, described the operation:

You already know by this time the news on the preliminary moves to take out Lae, but I will tell you about the show on the 5th September, when we took Nadzab with 1,700 paratroops and with General MacArthur in a B-17 over the area watching the show and jumping up and down like a kid. I was flying number two in the same flight with him and the operation really was a magnificent spectacle. I truly don't believe that another air force in the world today could have put this over as perfectly as the 5th Air Force did. Three hundred and two airplanes in all, taking off from eight different fields in the Moresby and Dobodura areas, made a rendezvous right on the nose over Marilinan, flying through clouds, passes in the mountains and over the top. Not a single squadron did any circling or stalling around but all slid into place like clockwork and proceeded on the final flight down the Watut valley, turned to the right down the Markham and went directly to the target. Going north down the valley of the Watut and Marilinan, this was the picture: heading the parade at 1,000 feet were six squadrons of B-25 strafers, with the eight .50 calibre guns in the nose and sixty frag bombs in each bomb bay; immediately behind and about 500 feet above were six A-20's, flying in pairs—three pairs abreast—to lay smoke as the last frag bomb exploded. At about 2,000 feet and directly behind the A-20's came 96 C-47's carrying paratroops, supplies and some artillery. The C-47's flew in three columns of three plane elements, each column carrying a battalion set up for a particular battalion dropping ground. On each side along the column of transports and about 1,000 feet above them were the close cover fighters. Another group of fighters sat at seven thousand feet and, up in the sun, staggered from fifteen to twenty thousand was still another group. Following the transports came five B-17's, racks loaded with 3,000-pound packages with parachutes, to be dropped to the paratroopers on call by panel signals as they needed them. This mobile supply unit stayed over Nadzab practically all day, serving the paratroops below, dropping a total of fifteen tons of supplies in this manner. Following the echelon to the right and just behind the five supply B-17's was a group of twenty-four B-24's and four B-17's which left the column just before the junction of the Watut and the Markham to take out the Jap defensive position at Heath's Plantation, about halfway between Nadzab and Lae. Five weather ships were used prior to and during the show along the route and over the passes, to keep the units straight on weather to be encountered during their flights to the rendezvous. . . .

The strafers checked in on the target at exactly the time set, just prior to take off. They strafed and frag bombed the whole area in which the jumps were to be made and then as the last bombs exploded the smoke layers went to work. As the streams of smoke were built up, the three columns of transports slid into place and in one minute and ten seconds from the time the first parachute opened the last of 1,700 paratroopers had dropped. At the same time nine B-25's and sixteen P-38's attacked the Jap refueling airdrome at Cape Gloucester. One medium bomber and one fighter on the ground were burned and three medium bombers and one

fighter destroyed in combat. Two ack ack positions were put out of action and several supply and fuel dumps set on fire. Simultaneously also, ten Beauforts, five A-20's and seven P-40's from the R.A.A.F. put the Jap refueling field at Gasmata out of action. No air interception was made by the Japs on any of the three missions. Our only losses were two Beauforts shot down by ack ack at Gasmata.

The 9th Division clashed with the Japanese defenders early on the 6th September, but were making rapid progress along the coast towards Lae. In the afternoon of that day, eighty enemy bombers and fighters were over Nadzab and Lae. One enemy force machine-gunned the 9th Division's headquarters. The enemy aircraft were engaged by American Lightnings which claimed the shooting down of eight for a loss of one Lightning. The Japanese attacked again in the air the following day.

At 2 p.m. on 7th September enemy fighters opened fire on two Bostons of No. 22 Squadron, five miles south of the New Britain coast. The Japanese fighters were flying line astern as they approached to within 400 yards and attacked from the side. The Boston pilots turned their aircraft head-on towards the fighters firing their machine-guns and then escaped into clouds. Neither the Bostons nor the Japanese aircraft were hit.

The Bostons continued the bombardment of Gasmata on 7th September and landed bombs within ten yards of a gun position. They discovered a small enemy vessel on which they obtained direct hits with two bombs which, however, did not explode.

On this day also, the Beaufighters attacked six barges. Two days later, on 9th September, Japanese fire holed five Beaufighters engaged on a barge sweep. In the afternoon of the same day two Beaufighters were sent to examine at close range Japanese progress in building a road from Cape Archway towards Gasmata. Each Beaufighter carried an army officer as well as its normal crew of two. One of the Beaufighters piloted by Flying Officer Newman[8] with Flying Officer Binnie[9] as navigator and Captain Gill[1], an army observer, was forced into the sea near Palmalmal plantation after being hit by anti-aircraft fire. The other Beaufighter stayed overhead while fuel supplies lasted and saw the three men in the water without apparent injury. For three days Beaufighters and Bostons searched for them. The day after the crash they were seen in a dinghy. Food and a second dinghy were dropped and they paddled towards it and waved, but subsequent searches revealed no further trace. On 11th September a Seagull amphibian of No. 1 Rescue and Communication Squadron, piloted by Flying Officer Bonython,[2] with Flying Officer Kelley[3] of No. 30 Squad-

[8] F-O J. R. Newman, 404733; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Brisbane; b. Ayr, Qld, 1 Jun 1920. Killed in action 10 Sep 1943.

[9] F-O W. G. R. Binnie, 43912; 30 Sqn. Commercial traveller; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 1 Dec 1915. Killed in action 10 Sep 1943.

[1] Capt T. F. Gill, SX4550. 2/27 Bn; attached 30 Sqn. Chartered accountant; of Largs Bay, SA; b. Largs Bay, 18 Aug 1914. Killed in action 10 Sep 1943.

[2] F-O R. G. Bonython, 416822. 9 Sqn, 1 Rescue and Commn Sqn. Clerk; of Marden, SA; b. Rose Park, SA, 12 Nov 1915. Killed in action 11 Sep 1943.

[3] F-O R. A. Kelley, 1432. 4, 24 and 30 Sqns. Regular airman; of Northgate, Qld; b. Punchbowl, NSW, 16 Mar 1917. Killed in action 11 Sep 1943.

ron as navigator failed to return to base during the search and was not seen again.

The Bostons ran into more trouble on 12th September, when a flight of four bombed Gasmata Island. Flight Lieutenant Dawkins'[4] machine was hit by enemy fire and force-landed on the sea 35 miles south of Gasmata. The crew escaped into a dinghy but were not seen again. Another Boston piloted by Pilot Officer Riley,[5] who dropped his bombs on the target, failed to return and nothing further was seen of him or his crew. Flying Officer Rowell's aircraft was hit in the pilot's cockpit and crash-landed at Vivigani, but the crew escaped uninjured.

The mounting Australian losses were increased on 19th September when the commanding officer of No. 30 Squadron (Wing Commander Glasscock) and his navigator (Flying Officer Cain[6]) were killed in an attack on enemy barges, dumps and anti-aircraft positions near the airfield at Cape Hoskins. Glasscock's Beaufighter was hit and crashed. (The wreckage of the aircraft was found by American soldiers when they later occupied this area.)

On 1st September, a detachment of No. 4 Squadron, comprising ten pilots and a navigator, had flown eight Boomerangs and two Wirraways to Tsili Tsili to take part in the Lae-Nadzab campaign in direct support of the 7th and 9th Divisions. Each division was to have four Boomerangs and a Wirraway at its disposal for reconnaissance, supply dropping, ferrying officers, and strafing. The squadron's aircraft were kept at constant stand-by at Tsili Tsili and generally the time between receipt of a request for a mission and the arrival of the aircraft over the target was forty minutes. It was found that tactical reconnaissance had to be carried out at an altitude of not more than 200 feet over the jungle and frequently enemy small-arms fire struck low-flying Boomerangs.

The 7th Division had pushed rapidly from Nadzab to the outskirts of Lae which they reached on 14th September. The Japanese, with their communications between Lae and Finschhafen cut by the 9th Division, realised it was impossible to hold Lae, and General Adachi, commander of the *XVIII Army,* ordered the *51st Division* at Lae to withdraw. This withdrawal had begun on 8th September and on 13th September infantry of the 7th Australian Division captured enemy papers giving details of his evacuation plans and routes. Major-General Vasey[7] asked No. 4 Squadron to deliver a copy of the translated document to Port Moresby for action by New Guinea Force. In the meantime, Major-General

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[4] F-Lt H. B. Dawkins, 280791; 22 Sqn. Clerk; of Gawler, SA; b. Gawler, 15 Apr 1917. Died while POW 22 Jul 1944.

[5] P-O E. G. T. Riley, 411522; 22 Sqn. Salesman; of Hurstville, NSW; b. Gordon, NSW, 11 Oct 1917. Killed in action 12 Sep 1943.

[6] F-O J. J. Cain, 1446; 30 Sqn. Cinematographer; of Long Gully, Vic; b. Bendigo, Vic, 16 Dec 1918. Killed in action 19 Sep 1943.

[7] Maj-Gen G. A. Vasey, CB, CBE, DSO. (1st AIF; 2 Div Arty and BM 11 Inf Bde.) AA & QMG 6 Div 1939-41; GSO.1 6 Div 1941; comd 19 Inf Bde 1941; GOC 6 Div 1942, 7 Div 1942-44. Regular soldier; of Melbourne; b. Malvern, Vic, 29 Mar 1895. Killed in aircraft accident 5 Mar 1945.

Wootten[8] moved the 2/24th Battalion and 2/4th Independent Company from the fighting in preparation for a move to cut the Japanese escape route. The papers were given to Flying Officer Staley[9] who, in spite of heavy rain, took off at 10 p.m. from Tsili Tsili in a Wirraway. The rain and wind continued and at Dobodura an enemy aircraft was in the area causing an alert at the airfield and preventing him from landing. He tried to go on directly to Port Moresby but the weather made it impossible for him to find his way through the "gap" in the Owen Stanley Mountains, and returning to Dobodura he waited for a night fighter to land. A flare path was lit and he was able to follow in on the night fighter's tail. Bad weather continued, but Staley refuelled and took off again determined to get to Port Moresby. This time he succeeded in finding the "gap" and he delivered the papers at 1.30 next morning. As a result Wootten was ordered to hasten the movement to block the escape route, so the 2/24th Battalion was ordered to recross the Busu River immediately and march rapidly northwards in order to cut all routes from Lae through the Musom area. However, the bulk of the enemy forces had escaped for the time being up the Busu River. Some 6,400 of them reached Kiari on the north coast, after losing approximately 2,000 from cold and starvation in the trek over the ranges.

The 7th Division occupied Lae on 16th September, but had to withdraw because the 9th Division was shelling it from the east. Efforts by the 7th to communicate with the 9th to stop the shelling failed, but finally a Boomerang of No. 4 Squadron got word through and the shelling ceased. Lae had been completely shattered by the constant air attacks and, when it fell on 16th September, the occupying troops found smashed houses, wrecked trucks, aircraft and gun posts; and fox holes filled with Japanese bodies. The enemy had also withdrawn from Salamaua, and this town had been occupied by the Australians on 11th September.

Late in August, General Kenney had asked for a squadron of Australian dive bombers to be sent to New Guinea for use against difficult "pin-point" targets in the Huon Gulf area, and No. 24 Squadron had been hurried from Bankstown, New South Wales, where it had been training its aircrews in the new Vultee Vengeance aircraft, to Tsili Tsili. The squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Honey,[1] arrived at Tsili Tsili, which was also occupied by the No. 4 Squadron detachment and a number of American squadrons, on 2nd September. By 7th September it was in action against the Japanese. The squadron's mission was intended to be a temporary one and little or no equipment was sent with the aircraft. This later proved a source of considerable difficulty when it was decided to retain the unit in New Guinea, and delay occurred in bringing up the main body of the squadron.

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[8] Maj-Gen G. F. Wootten, CB, CBE, DSO, ED. (1st AIF: 1 Bn and BM 11 and 9 Inf Bdes.) CO 2/2 Bn 1939-40; comd 18 Inf Bde 1941-43; GOC 9 Div 1943-45. Solicitor; of West Wyalong and Mosman, NSW; b. Marrickville, NSW, 1 May 1893.

[9] F-Lt E. R. Staley, 401679. 5 and 4 Sqns. Farmer; of Natya, Vic; b. Bristol, Eng, 14 Aug 1911. Killed in action 31 Dec 1943.

[1] W Cdr B. Honey, DFC, 260429. Comd 24 Sqn 1943-44. Manufacturer's representative; of Darling Point, NSW; b. Sydney, 13 Oct 1914.

The Fifth Air Force sent the squadron to attack bridges on the Bogadjim road to hinder the enemy's reinforcement of his garrisons in the area. Their first task was assigned on 7th September, but bad weather forced the aircraft to return after jettisoning their bombs. Their fuel was almost exhausted but luckily American Lightnings deducing that they were having difficulty in finding their base guided them to Tsili Tsili where they landed safely. The Vengeances completed their task next day, but were in trouble again when American vessels fired on them and American fighters were sent up to shoot them down. Fortunately the fighters were recalled before they opened fire.

The Lae-Nadzab operation was a great success. In a swift 12-day campaign which gave the Australians possession of Lae, with its shipping facilities and Nadzab with its great promise as an air base, the 7th and 9th Divisions had suffered only 700 battle casualties, including 77 officers and men killed. With the help of air power, the normally difficult rear attack had been accomplished. Land, sea and air weapons had been skilfully combined in a well-planned military operation to which the weakened enemy could give no answer.

To exploit the success at Lae, General MacArthur now ordered the Australians to move into the Kaiapit and Dumpu areas. This move would block Japanese penetration southward through the Ramu and Markham valleys, and push the fighter aircraft line further towards the Japanese air bases at Wewak. Kaiapit was seized on 20th September by the 2/6th Commando Squadron and, with the enemy in retreat, the 7th Division pushed on up the Ramu towards Gusap and Dumpu.

The ease with which the Australians had taken Lae and Nadzab led to a hurried change of plans. The attack on Finschhafen could be made immediately, and accordingly, on 20th September, General MacArthur approved the I Australian Corps' suggestion that troops of the 9th Division should land at Finschhafen on 22nd September. The capture of this port would be the first step towards gaining control of the Huon Peninsula and dominating the New Guinea side of Vitiaz Strait. The landing was to be protected overhead by intensive efforts of General Kenney's squadrons which would not only strike at targets in the immediate battle area, but again fan out towards New Britain and beyond the Markham to attack the enemy's lines of supply and reinforcement.

In mid-September the American squadrons attacked Wewak and the Cape Gloucester airfield which lay on the western tip of New Britain across Vitiaz Strait from Finschhafen, while the R.A.A.F. was engaged against Cape Hoskins and Gasmata. The Vengeances of No. 24 Squadron attacked targets close to Finschhafen itself, which also received attention from American squadrons. Fourteen Vengeances from the squadron took part in the air bombardment of Finschhafen on the morning of 18th September, diving down to within 1,500 feet to drop 500-lb bombs on gun positions and buildings, after which they machine-gunned targets, firing 7,000 rounds of ammunition.

The Finschhafen landing was timed for the early morning of 22nd September; the previous day squadrons of American heavy bombers raided Cape Gloucester airfield, while three Bostons and ten Beauforts of No. 9 Group bombed Gasmata, dropping twelve tons of bombs on or near the runway again for the purpose of ensuring the enemy could not stage aircraft there for attacks on the beach-head the following day. The Beauforts, five of which were from No. 8 (Torpedo) Squadron, just arrived in the New Guinea area, attacked before dawn. The Bostons attacked later and one aircraft, while returning to base discovered a 300-foot submarine, loaded with supplies, south of Gasmata. The Bostons strafed the submarine and its deck cargo before it crash-dived.

The Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron were led by their commanding officer, Wing Commander Nicoll. No. 9 Group had been greatly strengthened by the arrival of this additional squadron from the mainland and the conversion of No. 6 Squadron from Hudson aircraft to Beauforts. No. 8 Squadron had been given Beauforts in March 1943 and went through a rigorous training as a torpedo squadron. After some service at Townsville, Queensland, and long delay awaiting sea transport, the entire squadron was moved to Goodenough and began operations in September.

On 21st September, the Vengeance squadron had attacked again, this time at Tami Islands, a few miles off the coast from Finschhafen, where their task was to destroy an enemy radio-location station. They made six direct hits on this station and when the army occupied the island later, it was discovered that the station had been destroyed. Machine-gun nests had also been blown up and many dead Japanese were found.

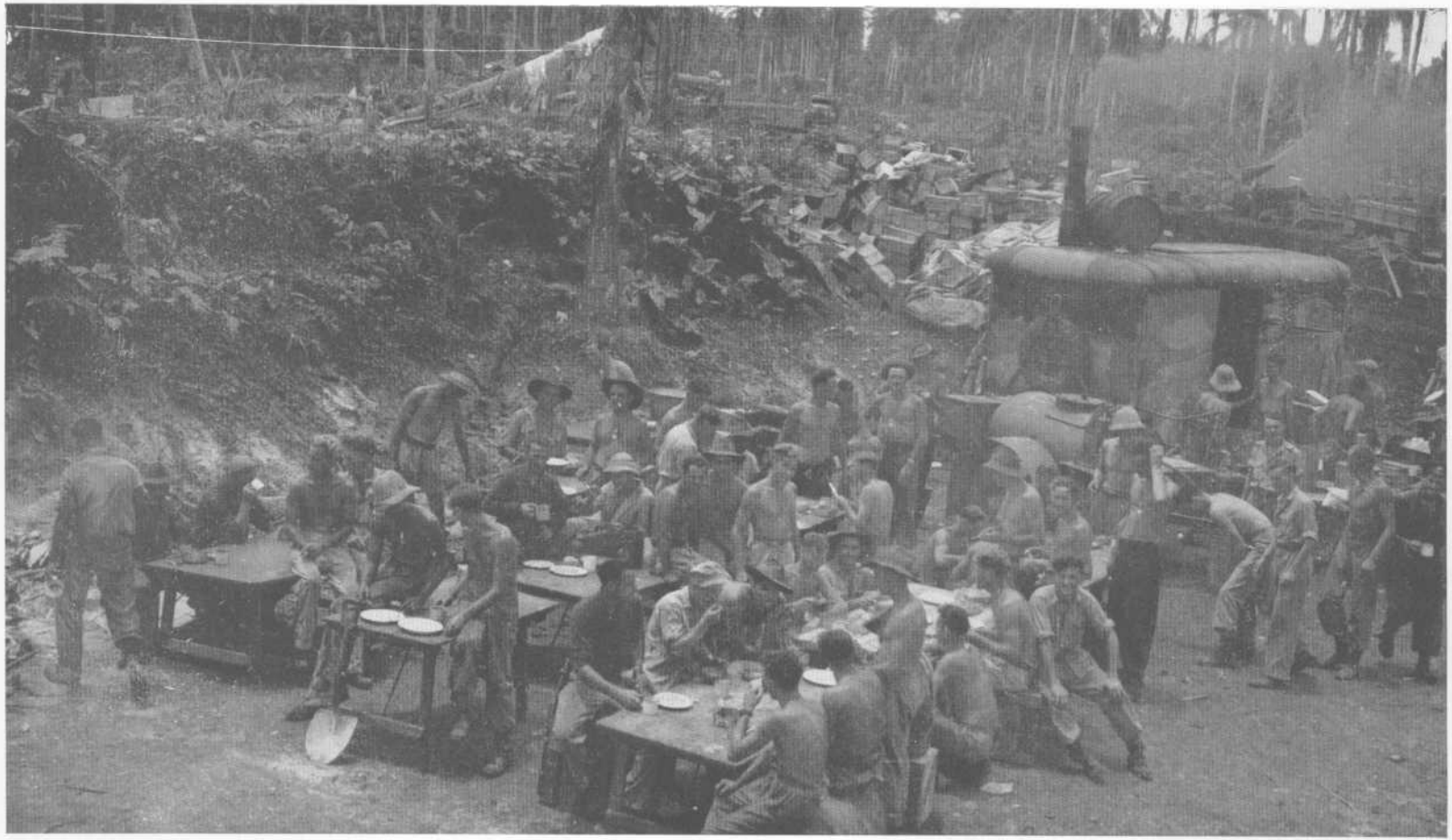
The enemy expected an attack on Finschhafen and Major-General Yamada was ordered to try and hold the port or at least delay the advance. Late on 21st September enemy aircraft attempted to bomb barges at the mouth of the Burep River, where the Australians were embarking for Finschhafen, but were driven off by American fighters, sent to the area by the fighter-director ship *Reid*. The following day the 20th Brigade of the 9th Division made its landing on Scarlet Beach, just north of Finschhafen. Some six hours after the landing the Japanese mounted their greatest air counter-attack in the South Pacific since the one on 30th June at New Georgia. They sent about 70 fighters and bombers which attacked shipping and beach positions between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. The attackers were beaten off by 90 patrolling American fighters which claimed destruction of about half the enemy force.

In an effort to prevent the staging in of more enemy planes from Rabaul to the battle area, 12 Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron, which was now based at Kiriwina, were sent that afternoon to dive-bomb Gasmata airfield. Led by Arthur they were armed with 500-lb demolition bombs, five of which they dropped near the airfield. They struck at Gasmata again at 6.30 next morning with twelve bombs which they dropped from as low as 2,000 feet. Only four, however, hit the target and three were



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Refuelling a Beaufighter of No. 30 Squadron in mid-1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

On 8th March 1944, soon after landing in the Admiralties, ground staffs of No. 73 Wing at mess in a revetment built by the Japanese to protect their aircraft from bombing.

seen to drop harmlessly into the sea. Flight Sergeant Roantree,[2] one of the pilots, did not return to base and searches later revealed no trace of him or his aircraft. He was the only pilot lost by No. 76 Squadron during its stay at Kiriwina. The Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron had also attacked the Cape Hoskins airfield at dawn on this day, losing one crew, captained by Flying Officer Spooner.[3]

Although the Allied air bases at Goodenough and Kiriwina had become well-established and were a direct threat to Rabaul, the enemy by the end of September had still not sent their squadrons to attack them. The Australian fighter pilots who were responsible for the defence of this base were not therefore experiencing any air-to-air fighting. Enemy aircraft were frequently discovered on raids in the direction of Dobodura, but they were always too far distant for interception by the Australian pilots. Long periods of inactivity were becoming irksome to the fighter men, and some who had served in the Middle East earlier in the war and were familiar with the use of Hurricane fighters as light bombers asked that their machines be fitted with the necessary racks for carrying bombs.[4]

Wing Commander Garrisson,[5] the armament officer of No. 9 Group, arranged for the necessary bomb racks to be fitted. After initial difficulties this was done and the Kittyhawk pilots were trained in the technique of bombing, although some at first were dubious about carrying bomb loads over water and considered that, with a live bomb under the wings, take-off was dangerous. Occasionally bombs had broken loose during take-off and skidded along runways.

In low-level attacks fighter-bombers were less vulnerable to ground fire than Beauforts because of their superior speed, and before long proved their value in the new role. Not only would the pilots have more to do, but the fighter-bomber was economical because it could both fight and bomb, and needed only one man as crew. Light bombers, although they had three or four men in the crew, had the advantage of being able to bomb more accurately from greater heights and could also, of course, carry a bigger bomb load a longer distance than the fighter-bomber.

The activities of No. 9 Group during September had been intense and varied. The Beaufighters made 130 sorties in this period, during which they claimed destruction of 33 barges and damage to 51, in addition to strafing airfields. The efforts of the three Beaufort squadrons were limited by the necessity of making daily flights in search of enemy shipping or convoying friendly ships. They were even used at times as transports. Losses of the group during the month had been heavy—6 Beauforts with

[2] F-Sgt M. Roantree, 422300; 76 Sqn. Clerk; of Cremorne, NSW; b. Sydney, 6 Dec 1922. Killed in action 22 Sep 1943.

[3] F-O F. S. Spooner, 402682; 8 Sqn. Clerk; of Beecroft, NSW; b. Sydney, 21 Aug 1918. Killed in action 23 Sep 1943.

[4] On 11 March 1942 Sqn Ldr Caldwell, who then commanded 112 Sqn RAF, dropped the first bomb from a Kittyhawk. "Since then," wrote Roderic Owen (in *Desert Air Force*), "aircraft originally designed as fighters had been carrying greater and greater bomb loads. As the Kittyhawk became outmoded as a fighter, the process of converting them to fighter-bombers was continued."

[5] Gp Capt A. D. J. Garrisson, 148. Armament Offr North-Eastern Area 1942, 9 Gp 1943; comd Air Armament School 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Point Piper, NSW; b. Brisbane, 23 Jun 1915.

5 of their crews, 3 Beaufighters and 3 crews, and 3 Bostons and 2 crews. The growing strength of the attacks by the Fifth Air Force and No. 9 Group was indicated by the increased tonnage of bombs dropped. In June a total of 518 tons had been expended, compared with 2,286 tons in September.

In October, No. 30 Squadron continued barge sweeps around the New Britain coast, but with less success since the enemy was now sending fewer barges to New Guinea. On 2nd October two Beaufighters on a barge sweep overtook a Betty bomber flying within a few feet of sea level. The Beaufighters decided to attack it and took up positions on each side of the enemy, taking it in turns to fire. Pilot Officer Marron[6] hit the rear gunner, putting the rear gun out of action. This enabled Flight Lieutenant Thomson[7] in the second Beaufighter to make a full astern approach. He opened fire at 200 yards and closed to 150 yards after which the Betty burst into flames and nose-dived into the water from 70 feet. Two days later, the same two Beaufighters again out on a barge sweep were attacked by Zeke fighters, seven miles from Brown Island. They evaded the fighters by diving to sea level where they drew away at a speed of 250 knots.

With a big force of aircraft in the Rabaul area, the enemy had become more active in the air early in October and another attack was made on an aircraft of No. 9 Group on 8th October. It was a Beaufort, captained by Flying Officer Barr,[8] on an armed search over the Solomon Sea, flying at 1,500 feet. Six enemy fighters were seen approaching at 3,000 feet, so Barr jettisoned his bomb load and turned towards clouds for cover. The fighters rapidly drew level, however, two coming in from port and four from starboard. They then attacked alternately in pairs, but the attacks were poorly executed and the enemy fighters as they turned away exposed their bellies to fire. Machine-gun bursts from the Beaufort's turret entered an Oscar which fell away smoking, and a Zeke appeared to drop, out of control, when hit by another burst of fire. The duel lasted 37 minutes and the aircraft was holed in the tailplane and fuselage in 17 places but was able to make its way home.

This success was a fine example of crew coordination, perfected by hours of practice in operational squadrons.

From the moment when the turret gunner (Flying Officer Haseler[9]) sighted the enemy fighters he virtually controlled the aircraft (wrote Barr later), giving a brief commentary on what was happening, and ordering turns in the direction of the attack. The only time I, as captain, took complete control was when it appeared certain we were to be rammed head on. The Beaufort's front-firing guns, four .303 Brownings, eliminated this Zero from the attacking force, and once again the

[6] F-Lt E. M. Marron, DFC, 401987; 30 Sqn. Salesman; of East St Kilda, Vic; b. Melbourne, 30 Jul 1917.

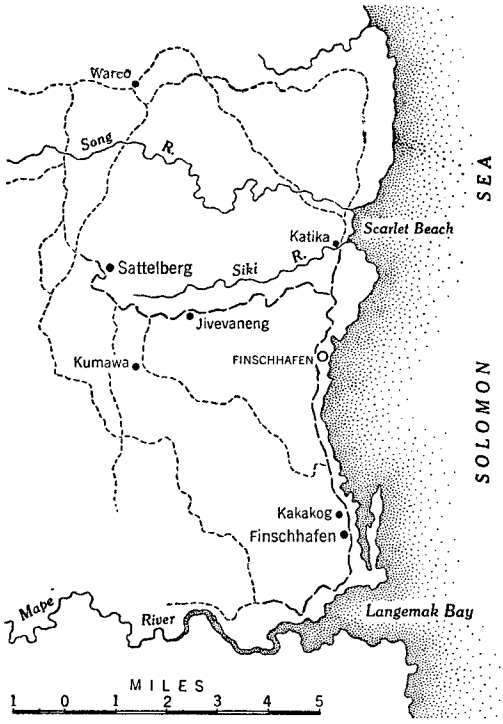
[7] Sqn Ldr A. A. Thomson, DFC, 281731. 30 and 37 Sqns. Commercial pilot; of Gladstone, Qld; b. Gunnedah, NSW, 5 Nov 1918.

[8] F-Lt W. A. Barr, DFC, 415572. 32 and 6 Sqns. Student; of Bullfinch, WA; b Southern Cross, WA, 21 Jan 1919.

[9] F-Lt J. Haseler, DFC, 405970. 32 and 6 Sqns. Salesman; of New Farm, Qld; b. Brisbane, 1 Sep 1912.

control was back in F-O Haseler's hands. Much assistance was given by the navigator, F-Lt Blythe,[1] who by curt signs kept me in touch with progress, and by Sgt Williams,[2] manning the waist guns.

On 11th October enemy float-planes escorting a convoy of six ships in St George's Channel attacked another patrolling Beaufort from No. 6 Squadron. The Beaufort, piloted by Flying Officer Hales,[3] was on the usual daily patrol when it saw the convoy 30 miles away. Hales headed his Beaufort towards the convoy and while the enemy air escorts were on one side of the convoy he dived from the other side towards a 2,000-ton vessel on which he scored a direct bomb hit amidships. It listed 50 degrees, righted itself and caught fire. Hales having used up his bomb load headed for base. The enemy aircraft pursued him but he shook them off.




After the landing at Scarlet Beach the 20th Brigade marched towards Finschhafen against stiffening enemy opposition. The R.A.A.F. dive bombers, now based at Dobodura where some of the administrative and servicing officers and men of the squadron had arrived, were called on again and again to strike at enemy ground positions. On 28th September, in the afternoon, twelve of them came down in their 300-mile-an-hour dives to bomb the shores of Langemak Bay. The target was hidden by clouds of dust and smoke after their attack and the pilots could not therefore report the results, but the 9th Division later told them that the attack had been "most effective". By 1st October, the army had closed for the final assault on Finschhafen. This assault was preceded by attacks of No. 24 Squadron dive bombers and Bostons of No. 89 American

[1] F-Lt T. C. Blythe, 411437. 32 and 6 Sqns. School teacher; of Markwell, NSW; b. Wauchope, NSW, 14 Aug 1915.

[2] W-O R. J. Williams, 416304. 7 and 6 Sqns. Firewood merchant; of Brompton Park, SA; b. Broken Hill, NSW, 28 Sep 1918.

[3] F-Lt S. G. Hales, DFC. 415029. 14, 6 and 37 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Swanbourne, WA; b. Swanbourne, 19 Mar 1922.

Squadron, which frequently aided the ground troops with close-support bombing. The Bostons attacked first at 10.30 a.m. followed by the Vengeances, one of which dived so low that it was struck by a splinter from one of its own exploding bombs. The artillery, meanwhile, had been pounding the target and the 2/13th Battalion attacked Kakakog with success at midday, losing ten men killed, and on the following morning at 11 Finschhafen was in Allied hands.

In late September and early October the enemy had been increasing the number of his aircraft at bases in New Britain-New Guinea, and in this period his air attacks became more frequent, though they were far below the strength of the initial raids at Finschhafen on 22nd September. As well as regularly attacking the troops at Finschhafen, the enemy for the first time began to take an interest in the R.A.A.F. bases at Kiriwina and Goodenough which now experienced a number of raids. No. 305 Radar Station at Kiriwina located a small raiding force of six aircraft when it was still 115 miles out on 5th October. This force attacked at 7.50 that night killing three men and injuring another fifteen. Goodenough Island was attacked the same night by enemy aircraft but no damage or casualties resulted. During the week 8th-15th October, the enemy raided Finschhafen, Goodenough, Dobodura, Woodlark Island, Kiriwina again, and Lae.

The frequent presence of enemy fighters during this small-scale enemy air offensive, made it necessary to send eight Kittyhawks of No. 77 Squadron to Nadzab where they were given the task of flying as escorts to the No. 4 Squadron flight supporting the 7th Division. They began this flying duty next day when four Kittyhawks escorted two aircraft from No. 4 on a tactical reconnaissance in the Markham Valley, but no enemy fighters were encountered. On 6th October, the Kittyhawks were ordered to attempt an interception of a Japanese general who was believed to be flying from Wewak to Rabaul. Led by Flight Lieutenant Kinross,[4] the Kittyhawks circled over Karkar Island across which the general was believed to be passing, but no aircraft was seen, and they returned to Nadzab. Little of moment occurred while the Kittyhawks were at Nadzab and they were withdrawn to rejoin their squadron at Goodenough on 19th October.

Soon after the 9th Division occupied Finschhafen, the Japanese, who had been rapidly gathering a force of about 10,000 men round Sattelberg and Wareo, became active. A company was isolated by the enemy at Jivevaneng and ran out of supplies and ammunition. Wirraways of No. 4 Squadron were sent on 4th October to drop grenades and Owen gun ammunition together with orders from the commander of the 9th Division to withdraw. The company withdrew the same day, rejoining its battalion by making a detour round the enemy's position. Three companies of the 2/3rd Pioneer Battalion were also isolated west of Katika but No. 4

[4] Sqn Ldr I. R. Kinross, 250731. Comd 77 Sqn 1943-44, 1 Sqn 1945. Clerk; of North Brighton, Vic; b. Caulfield, Vic, 2 Apr 1921.

Squadron located them and dropped messages with instructions for them to return to the Australian lines.

The Japanese were pressing hard on the 2/17th Battalion's positions at Kumawa on 6th and 7th October and on the two following days Australian Vengeances and American Bostons bombed and machine-gunned the enemy's local main base at Sattelberg. The position of the Australians was becoming precarious, and the 24th Brigade was brought in to strengthen them and prepare to meet the expected enemy counter-attack which began on 16th October when the Japanese, disregarding losses, heavily attacked the 2/17th Battalion. Next day, heralded by air bombardment, enemy troops in barges attempted to land at Scarlet Beach but were defeated and withdrew. Again on 17th October Wirraways had to drop ammunition and food to isolated companies. Fierce fighting continued for several days and another Australian brigade, the 26th, was brought in. The enemy sent daily air missions to bomb the infantry, while American Mitchells and Bostons joined the Vengeances in aiding the infantry, the Mitchells attacking on the 18th, and the Bostons and Vengeances on the 19th October. By 25th October, the enemy attacks had been broken and Finschhafen was safe. Counted enemy dead totalled 679, not including many already buried, while the 9th Division, between 16th and 28th October, suffered 228 battle casualties of which 49 were killed in action. With the enemy counter-attack defeated, Finschhafen could now be developed as an air base to give protection for the next stage of the advance towards Rabaul.

CHAPTER 6

# AIR ASSAULT ON RABAUL

FROM the beginning of the struggle in the islands north of Australia the eyes of both protagonists had been fixed on Rabaul. During nearly two years of occupation it had become a central stronghold of Japanese martial power. From it the enemy filtered out reinforcements of arms, men and food supplies to their lesser bases in the South-West Pacific.

Rabaul had a deep and roomy harbour, capable of holding 300,000 tons of shipping, which sheltered supply vessels, barges and fighting ships. On 12th October 1943 there were about 329 enemy aircraft, mainly fighters, in the New Britain area, and round Rabaul five airfields were in use. Lakunai and Vunakanau airfields had been in existence when the Japanese seized Rabaul in January 1942. Vunakanau, which had been built by the R.A.A.F., was improved by the Japanese. They surfaced the runway with concrete to a depth of four inches and built 90 fighter and 60 bomber revetments. The Japanese made three more airfields in 1942 and 1943: Rapopo, completed in December 1942 at Lesson Point, with a concrete runway 4,600 feet long; Keravat, 13 miles south-west of Rabaul, begun as an army airfield in 1942, abandoned and then completed by the navy in 1943; Tobera, with a concrete runway stretching 3,600 feet and revetments for 75 fighters and 2 bombers, completed by August 1943.

The ground at Rabaul bristled with 367 anti-aircraft guns manned by well-trained army and navy crews who were ready at short notice to hurl a barrage of shells and bullets skywards at intruding Allied airmen, of whose approach they were warned by "spotters" and radio-location devices dotted around the island. Allied airmen considered Rabaul the "hot-spot" of the South Pacific.

At Rabaul was the headquarters of General Imamura, commander of the *Eighth Area Army,* and throughout New Britain was a garrison of about 100,000 (including labourers) whose equipment included artillery and tanks.[1] Along beaches where Allied amphibious attack might be expected the Japanese had skilfully placed underwater obstacles such as mines, concrete and log blocks and wire entanglements. Tank traps and ditches were dug behind the beach defences and covered farther inland by strong points. Imamura was prepared to hold Rabaul for years, if necessary, while the homeland, using goods from Japan's richly-endowed conquests, built its strength for the final battles which would give victory.

The Japanese, alarmed by their inability to hold the Allies in the Pacific, had searched for a new operational policy. Acrimony developed at headquarters in Tokyo between army and navy representatives. General Tojo proposed that the Japanese forces should abandon the Bismarcks

[1] Allied Intelligence estimated the garrison to be only about half this figure.

area and withdraw to a new perimeter running from the Marianas through Truk to Wewak, but Admiral Koga strongly opposed this course, demanding that Rabaul and its outer defences be held for as long as possible so that inner defences could be prepared. Koga's views prevailed, but it was recognised that it was no longer possible to fight a decisive battle in the Bismarcks, and the best that could be hoped for was that the garrisons there might gain time for the preparation of a counter-offensive in the Central and South Pacific in 1944.

The recapture of Rabaul was the principal task that General MacArthur was given after he took command in Australia in 1942, and all his earlier plans and the efforts of his men were aimed ultimately at this goal. He knew that Rabaul was very powerful and had expected a heavy air onslaught from it when his forces landed at Kiriwina and later at Lae. The enemy had then been capable of mounting such an offensive. However, it had not come, and it seemed to MacArthur that the Japanese were husbanding their strength until Rabaul was more closely pressed.

Until August 1943 the plan was still to capture Rabaul and use it as a base for the American Pacific Fleet's subsequent movement westward into the Philippines. In that month, however, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, meeting at Quebec, confirmed plans for a Central Pacific thrust into the Caroline Islands, and since this thrust would provide fleet bases it was suggested that it would not be necessary to occupy Rabaul. Instead it could be by-passed and neutralised, thus avoiding a costly and time-consuming campaign. MacArthur felt that to attack Wewak before taking Rabaul would involve great hazards and make success extremely doubtful. However, his objections were over-ruled, and a conference of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that Pacific forces should attack the Gilbert Islands, Marshall Islands and western New Britain during the summer of 1943-44, and that new airfields should be captured at Ponape and the Admiralty Islands in the winter of 1944, and at Truk, the Marianas and Guam in the spring and summer of 1944.

The decision to invade Western Europe in the spring of 1944 was also finally approved at the conference at Quebec and the invasion day was fixed tentatively as 1st May 1944. In the meantime, the combined R.A.F.-Eighth American Air Force bomber offensive against Germany was "to continue to have highest strategic priority", and was regarded as an essential preliminary to the invasion of Europe.

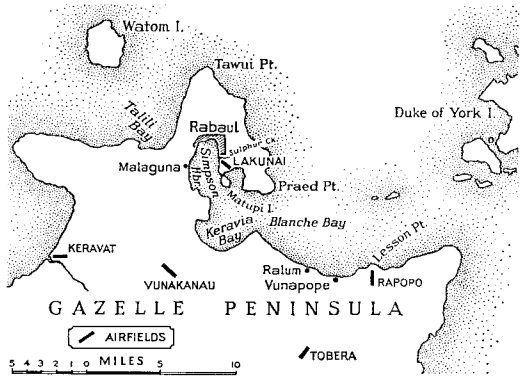
The next two advances in the South and South-West Pacific were to be to Bougainville and western New Britain respectively. Bougainville was to come first because General MacArthur wished bombers to be brought forward there to bombard Rabaul while his Sixth Army landed on western New Britain. This was considered essential because it seemed certain that the enemy would be provoked into a major effort when the New Britain landing was made; and South-West Pacific air forces, although by September 1943 they totalled 102 squadrons (Fifth Air Force having 59 and R.A.A.F. 43), were considered inadequate to cover the widely-

spread enemy points which would have to be attacked during amphibious operations to seize the Cape Gloucester area in New Britain and the operations on the New Guinea mainland. Meanwhile, Rabaul menaced Admiral Halsey's men who were to invade Bougainville, so MacArthur decided to "beat it down" from the air. The attacks were to start about 15th October.

At conferences in September between officers of the South-West Pacific and South Pacific commands MacArthur proposed the following outline plan and time-table for the Bougainville and western New Britain operations:

*a.* Between 15th October and 1st November, South-West Pacific air forces operating fighters from Kiriwina Island will attack airfields and shipping at Rabaul for the purpose of neutralising Japanese air forces and destroying shipping.
*b.* Between 20th and 25th October, South Pacific forces will occupy the Treasury Islands and selected positions in northern Choiseul Island.
*c.* Between 1st-6th November, South-West Pacific air forces continue attacks on Rabaul.
*d.* On or about 1st November, South Pacific forces land at Empress Augusta Bay, Bougainville, and establish air facilities from which daylight bombardment attacks on Rabaul may be protected by fighter aircraft.
*e.* Between 25th December and January, South-West Pacific forces seize the Saidor and Cape Gloucester areas. During this period South Pacific air forces deliver neutralising attacks on Rabaul, assisted by South-West Pacific air forces.

The original plan for the invasion of Bougainville called for a direct assault on the southern coast of the island, but Halsey had observed that enemy positions there were being strengthened. He therefore decided to by-pass them and look for a place where opposition would be weak. Torokina on Empress Augusta Bay seemed suitable, being weakly held. MacArthur agreed to this, and, meanwhile, on 22nd September, issued orders for the occupation of western New Britain and instructed General Kenney to begin "intensive neutralisation attacks against hostile air and surface operations in the Rabaul area starting on or about 15th October".




Kenney was ready before 15th October. After great preparations at Dobodura the first big raid was ready to go on the 12th. Including 12 Australian Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron, a total of 308 aircraft had been mustered, and the force was instructed to make the main attack in daylight. The same night 12 Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron were to attack

shipping in the waters around Rabaul. Patrol aircraft brought back news on 11th October that the Japanese had increased their strength at Rabaul. Photographs taken showed 294 aircraft, compared with 143 on 10th October. The increase had been mainly in fighter aircraft of which there were now 100 more. The increased strength at Rabaul, especially at Tobera airfield, was due in part to the withdrawal of a number of aircraft of the *26th Air Flotilla* from south Bougainville and in part to the arrival of reinforcements from the north.[2]

Led by Squadron Leader Boulton,[3] the Beaufighters went to Dobodura on 11th October, where they were to be under the command of First Air Task Force for the operation. Next morning they took off at 8.15. They had been delayed at the airfield by a dust haze caused by the Mitchells which went before them. Because of this they were late at the rendezvous and had to go on alone.

No. 9 Group's base at Kiriwina, at this time still the closest Allied base (310 miles) to Rabaul, became a scene of feverish activity on this day. The distance from Dobodura to Rabaul was 390 miles and it was necessary for the American Lightning fighters to call at Kiriwina for fuel. Australian ground crews had to handle a continuous stream of these staging aircraft. From dawn to dusk the crews toiled at the task of refuelling, servicing the aircraft and controlling the flow of traffic. Above Kiriwina where they were joined by their escorts, the fleet of Liberators, Mitchells and Fortresses could be heard continuously.

About 10.45 a.m., after the rest of the force had attacked Rabaul, the R.A.A.F. Beaufighters were nearing the target at sea level when they saw two squadrons of Mitchells approaching head on. The Mitchells, thinking the Beaufighters were enemy Sally aircraft, opened out their formation and fired on the Beaufighters, fortunately without hitting any. A squadron of Lightnings which were above the Mitchells, escorting them, then got in position for an attack on the Beaufighters, but Boulton stopped the attack just in time by calling the Lightnings on the radio.

Another result of leaving Dobodura late was that the Beaufighters were without fighter escorts when they reached Tobera airfield at 10.55 a.m. Before they could begin the attack, eighteen Zekes and one Hap, some with their wheels down ready to land, attacked them. The Beaufighters, whose mission was to strafe airfields, not engage fighters, wheeled to starboard, maintaining their formation with the intention of avoiding a dogfight. A running fight followed, however, lasting thirty minutes; some of the enemy fighters were damaged and two probably destroyed. One Beaufighter, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Stone,[4] with Flying Officer Morris-Hadwell[5] as navigator, disappeared two miles east of Tobera and was

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[2] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol II, p. 417: Captain Takashi Miyazaki.

[3] W Cdr W. T. M. Boulton, DFC, 216; comd 30 Sqn 1943-44. Regular air force offr; of Manly, NSW; b. Summer Hill, NSW, 25 Jul 1918.

[4] F-Lt D. R. Stone, 3406; 30 Sqn. Regular airman pilot; of Malvern, Vic; b. Clifton Hill, Vic, 5 Dec 1914. Killed in action 12 Oct 1943.

[5] F-O E. B. Morris-Hadwell, 1433; 30 Sqn. Radio technician; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Kidderminster, Worcs, Eng, 5 Oct 1917. Killed in action 12 Oct 1943.

considered to have been shot down in the engagement. Stone was last seen gaining height to attack enemy fighters. Wing Commander Emerton attacked one of the fighters and as he did so Rapopo airfield came into view. He then attacked the airfield from the lowest possible height, using full power. Three fighters closed on him making rear attacks for five minutes, but he broke away at a speed of 280 miles an hour. Enemy anti-aircraft weapons did not fire heavily on the Beaufighters because their own aircraft were in the air. The Beaufighter pilots could see destroyed and burning aircraft at Rapopo and big fires at Vunakanau where the Mitchells had made their low-level attacks.

Between 12 noon and 3 p.m. the fighters of Nos. 76, 77 and 79 Squadrons R.A.A.F. were sent up over Kiriwina to protect the American air escorts which were now arriving back from the mission, but the enemy sent no raiders to molest them. Eleven Beaufighters arrived safely, and after refuelling took off again for Dobodura for a second raid planned for the following day. An attempt in the afternoon to photograph the results of the raid failed when the Lightning sent by No. 75 Squadron was intercepted by two enemy fighters and, being unarmed, had to turn back to base.

Early next morning twelve Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Nicoll, attacked shipping in Simpson Harbour. Two torpedo attacks were made, but no results were observed. Foul weather saved Rabaul from a repetition on the following day. The Beaufighters' operation was cancelled altogether, except that some were sent to search for lost Lightnings, but the Fifth Air Force, frustrated by the weather on the way to Rabaul, turned some of its attack against Cape Gloucester, Cape Hoskins and Gasmata.

On 14th October General MacArthur made the raid on Rabaul the subject of a special communiqué, which declared that "the enemy has sustained a disastrous defeat from air attack at Rabaul . . . this operation gives us definite mastery in the air over the Solomon Sea and adjacent waters, and thereby threatens the enemy's whole perimeter of defence". General Arnold cabled congratulations to Kenney and his American and Australian units for this "Pearl Harbour in reverse". It was considered that the enemy at Rabaul had suffered as much from this attack as at Wewak in August. "Devastating blow at Rabaul" was the streamer headline across the front page of the Melbourne *Argus* of 14th October. "The raid (wrote Professor Morison later) was widely publicised as having 'knocked out' Rabaul; but the Bismarcks base was not even leaning on the ropes."[6] Admiral Kusaka, the Japanese commander, admitted after the war that the raid of 12th October was most damaging, although the aircraft destroyed in the air and on the ground were far less than the 177 claimed in the General Headquarters communiqué. In fact when the war ended it was established that the Japanese during the whole of October 1943 had lost only 55 aircraft at Rabaul.[7]

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[6] S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol VI (1950), p. 286.

[7] US Bombing Survey, *Campaign Against Rabaul*, p. 23. In November an additional 35 were lost.

After the attack on Rabaul the Fifth Air Force switched its main effort back to New Guinea to aid the Australian infantry, while No. 9 Group continued to attack the New Britain bases. Night attacks were made by No. 8 Squadron on Gasmata and Cape Hoskins on 16th October, where, in spite of bad visibility due to cloud and rain, dumps were bombed from 8,000 feet. The bad weather which persisted next day caused the cancellation of a number of raids. On 18th October three out of four Beauforts sent to Cape Hoskins again bombed this target. The other aircraft was forced to turn back because of the weather.

On 20th October Allied Intelligence learned of the movement of an enemy convoy, including two cruisers and a number of merchant vessels from Truk to Rabaul via Cape St George. No. 9 Group ordered a torpedo and bombing attack on the convoy by the men of all three Beaufort squadrons. No. 6 Squadron sent seven Beauforts led by Flight Lieutenant Oates;[8] No. 8 sent eleven, led by Nicoll; and No. 100 nine, led by Flight Lieutenant Tuttleby.[9] They left base after midnight on 22nd October, No. 6 Squadron coming from Milne Bay to Kiriwina the day before.

The cruisers were discovered at Cape St George and Nicoll's torpedo bombers attacked first, dropping five torpedoes, but could see no result. The rest of the Beauforts then attacked with bombs and saw three bright flashes on the port side of a cruiser. The pilots of No. 8 Squadron saw a fire blazing on the rear ship and men were seen to enter the lifeboats. During the attack the defenders fired heavily with anti-aircraft weapons. Flying Officer Vincent's[1] machine, although not seen to be hit, did not reach the base and Vincent was presumed lost with his crew. Flying Officer Hales of No. 6 Squadron, attacking just before dawn, dived from 3,000 feet to 1,400 feet to land his bombs, one of which appeared to drop down the funnel of the cruiser. Few of the Beauforts were able to see the results of their attacks because of the heavy anti-aircraft fire.[2]

Twenty-one Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron had dive-bombed Gasmata airfield on 21st October and on the 22nd the squadron was joined by Nos. 75 and 77 Squadrons in another attack on this target. Forty-six pilots took part in the combined attack and nine out of every ten bombs struck the target, causing a number of fires. Because of their short range, it had lately become something of a rarity for fighters of No. 9 Group to have an opportunity of shooting down Japanese aircraft, although there was always a possibility that the enemy might raid the bases at Kiriwina and Goodenough which the group had the responsibility of protecting. The only explanation why the enemy did not attack Kiriwina, which was

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[8] Sqn Ldr A. J. R. Oates, DFC, 260822. 14 and 6 Sqns. Clerk; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Newcastle, 22 Nov 1922.

[9] F-Lt C. E. Tuttleby, DFC, AFM, 2760. 7, 6, 100, 32 and 24 Sqns. Regular airman pilot; of Alphington, Vic; b. Collingwood, Vic, 4 Oct 1908.

[1] F-Lt G. H. Vincent, 400866; 8 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Werribee, Vic; b. Essendon, Vic, 1 Jul 1918. Presumed died as prisoner of war, on or after 14 Jan 1944.

[2] The United States Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee allows no sinkings of enemy vessels as a result of these attacks. However, the Beauforts may well have caused serious damage to one or more vessels.

providing a jumping-off point for heavy raids on Rabaul, appears to be that the navy air force at Rabaul was loth to attack in the New Guinea-Kiriwina area since it was an area of army air force responsibility, and the attacks should therefore be mounted by the *Fourth Air Army* from Wewak bases. However, the Fifth Air Force kept Wewak thoroughly bombed.

During October the enemy continued to attack Finschhafen, at times in some strength. On the night of 19th-20th October no fewer than 60 enemy planes attacked shipping in Langemak Bay and there was a heavy raid on Kiriwina on the night of 26th October, during which 75 bombs were dropped, killing and wounding a number of natives.

Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron had been hunting for enemy Jakes which carried out regular patrols from Cape Cunningham to Cormoran Head late each afternoon. On the afternoon of 23rd October four Beaufighters lying in wait near Cape Orford discovered a Jake flying at a height of 1,000 feet. The Jake's pilot immediately dived his machine to about fifty feet above ground, but two of the Beaufighters had no difficulty in getting into position on its stern. After four short bursts from cannon at 150 yards the Jake caught fire and crashed into the hills two miles east of Cape Orford. Return fire damaged the Beaufighter, which was piloted by Flying Officer Drury,[3] but it reached base safely.

As the time for Admiral Halsey's Bougainville landing approached, Kenney unleashed his bombers on Rabaul again. Forty-nine high-flying Liberators struck at Rapopo airfield dropping 105 tons of bombs from about 20,000 feet, at midday on 23rd October, while the Beauforts of Nos. 6 and 100 Squadrons struck at Gasmata and Cape Hoskins. On 24th October Kenney sent Mitchells escorted by Lightning fighters to bombard Tobera, Vunakanau and Rapopo airfields and the following day the Liberators were sent to bomb Lakunai. The aim was to destroy Rabaul's air power, and the enemy was replying to this threat by drawing fighter reinforcements from the Solomons, mainly Bougainville. On 25th October seventy enemy fighters, with aggressive and determined pilots at the controls, were in the air over Rabaul and fierce air battles ensued in which both sides lost aircraft.

Halsey, whose airmen were now heavily pounding enemy airfields in southern Bougainville, had asked for air missions by South-West Pacific forces against the airfield on Buka Island just north of Bougainville. Enemy planes which might operate from Buka could menace the landing of his marines at Empress Augusta Bay. Air Commodore Hewitt sent No. 8 Squadron to make an attack on the night of 25th October. Nine Beauforts loaded with high-explosive and incendiary bombs left Kiriwina at 7.30 p.m. and, some three hours later, in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire, made a successful attack on the airfield, storage dumps and dispersal areas at Buka. They silenced an anti-aircraft gun by dropping a 2,000-lb bomb near-by. On the way to Buka the Beauforts had to fly through low cloud and rain squalls and bad weather continued during the return flight.

[3] F-Lt E. G. Drury, 401924; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Northcote, Vic; b. Bacchus Marsh, Vic, 7 Aug 1918.

One of the Beauforts, piloted by Flight Sergeant Somerville,[4] could not find Goodenough, where it was to land. Somerville's aircraft, missing Goodenough, made landfall on the New Guinea coast near East Cape and while flying along the coast met more rain and low cloud. The aircraft struck the sea when the pilot tried to get down below the cloud. It sank immediately and although the pilot and Flight Sergeant Lee[5] escaped into the water and were later rescued, the other two members of the crew were not seen again.

Beginning on 25th October, the Catalinas of Nos. 11, 20 and 43 Squadrons joined in the general air bombardment of the Japanese bases in preparation for Halsey's advance. The Catalinas were taken off all other duties and were directed to strike at Japanese aircraft on the ground at Kavieng every night for a week. The three aircraft that went out on the first attack were hampered by the bad weather and poor visibility which persisted but each bombed the target. Squadron Leader Bolitho of No. 20 Squadron made two runs over the airfield, meeting heavy anti-aircraft fire. His machine was hit twice at the end of his second run, but the damage was not serious. The weather was again bad next night when six Catalinas headed for Kavieng to repeat the attack and only two reached the target. Two which failed to reach Kavieng bombed Gasmata as an alternative, another bombed what appeared to be ships at Talasea, and the sixth, after searching for the target for forty-six minutes, gave up, jettisoned its bombs and returned to base at Cairns.

Towards the end of October and early in November No. 9 Group was most active. Kittyhawks, Beauforts, Bostons, Catalinas (from North-Eastern Area) and Beaufighters were all playing their part in bombing attacks, strafing, patrolling, barge sweeps and harassing night raids. The monthly tonnage of bombs dropped by the whole of the R.A.A.F. in the Pacific war theatre had increased to 254 in October, compared with 137 in May, and most of this effort was by No. 9 Group.[6]

In the bombardment of Rabaul, the R.A.A.F., following the doctrines of the R.A.F., preferred to make night attacks, while the American bombers adhered to American Air Force doctrine and attacked in daylight, escorted by long-range fighters. Day versus night bombing had aroused considerable debate in the United Kingdom, where the British put their faith in night bombing with lightly-armed bombers carrying big bomb loads, the Americans in heavily-armed bombers with relatively light loads, attacking in daylight. The same difference in policy cropped up in the smaller operations in the South-West Pacific. The R.A.A.F. had

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[4] F-O K. F. Somerville, 412204; 8 Sqn. Shop assistant; of Parramatta, NSW; b. Echuca, Vic, 20 Aug 1918.

[5] W-O R. S. Lee, 412981; 8 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Mittagong, NSW; b. Mittagong, 6 Feb 1917.

[6] The RAAF Operational Base Unit (No. 46) at Kiriwina was now being inundated with visiting RAAF and American bomber and fighter squadron men. On 5 November the transit camp intake was 90 RAAF and 895 Fifth Air Force. The following day the figure rose to 150 RAAF and 905 Fifth Air Force. Buildings were taken over to give temporary cover and extra tents found. Meals were being served on a 24-hour basis, extra trucks, jeeps, cooks and cookhouse assistants being supplied by the US Sixth Army to help. As most of the visitors had no eating gear (reported the commander) the base unit had to supply them. The commander complained that the unit lost 400 knives, 400 spoons and 400 forks in a few days!

thoroughly trained its Beaufort crews in night flying; but in any case it would have been most imprudent to send the slow and vulnerable Beauforts over Rabaul in daylight against strong fighter opposition.

On 29th October Fifth Air Force heavy bombers with their escorts were again over Rabaul in the middle of the day and bombed Vunakanau where they destroyed aircraft on the ground. The pilots saw a number of enemy warships leaving the harbour. That night at 10.15 Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron led by Nicoll were sent to bomb Tobera airfield at Rabaul. They dropped bombs in the dispersal area and a dump area east of the airfield runway. Two days later No. 79 (Spitfire) Squadron had its first success against enemy aircraft in the New Guinea area. Flight Sergeant Callister[7] shot down an enemy search aircraft 40 miles north of Kiriwina. Callister got the aircraft in his sights at 800 yards and opened fire, closing to 600 yards. The enemy machine blew up and dived into the sea.

Meanwhile the northern Solomons campaign had begun. The landing in the Treasury Group by the 8th New Zealand Brigade on 27th October had been opposed on the beach and in the air, but the New Zealanders seized both Mono and Stirling without undue losses. On 1st November, while a diversionary attack was made on Choiseul Island, the 3rd American Marine Division landed at Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville, surprising the Japanese commander who had expected a landing in southern Bougainville where he had concentrated most of his men. Vice-Admiral Omori, commanding a Japanese force of four cruisers and eight destroyers, left Rabaul on 1st November to destroy the American troop transports in Empress Augusta Bay. Six Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron armed with torpedoes and led by Squadron Leader Price,[8] carried out a shipping sweep between Bougainville and Rabaul that day ready to strike at enemy vessels but the crews did not find Omori's squadron. However, an American naval force under Rear-Admiral Merrill attacked the force 50 miles north of the beachhead late that night when it was closing for an attack on the marine transports. In a furious torpedo and gun fight, lasting two hours, the Japanese lost a light cruiser (*Sendai*) and a destroyer (the *Hatsukaze*). The remaining vessels retired to Rabaul.

The Japanese commanders at Rabaul had been appealing strongly to Admiral Koga at Truk to send air assistance to meet the threat from Halsey and to beat off the air attacks which were plaguing them. Late in October Koga sent 300 fighters from the Combined Fleet. These aircraft began arriving at Rabaul on 1st November and as a result of this reinforcement Japanese air strength at Rabaul reached its peak for the war. The airfields had on them at this time 550 aircraft of which 390 were fighters. A number of float-planes at anchorages brought the grand total to 586.

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[7] F-Sgt I. H. Callister, 408963; 79 Sqn. Student; of Kew, Vic; b. Brighton, Vic, 18 Mar 1922. Callister was killed at Kiriwina airfield on 5 Nov 1943 when his machine collided with a Kittyhawk piloted by W Cdr Arthur, who suffered severe burns.

[8] Sqn Ldr O. Price, 271702; 8 Sqn. Flying instructor; of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Brisbane, 19 Sep 1912. Killed in action 9 Nov 1943.

In consequence the enemy sent up 125 fighters next day (2nd November) when 75 Mitchells, covered by Lightnings of the Fifth Air Force operating through Kiriwina, arrived over Rabaul to raid shipping and the town area. Nine of the Mitchells were lost, and nine Lightnings. The Fifth Air Force claimed 68 enemy planes destroyed. That night the Beauforts were sent again to bombard Tobera airfield. All three squadrons took part, No. 6 Squadron operating from Vivigani, and Nos. 8 and 100 from Kiriwina. Six Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron attacked first at 10 p.m. and all their bombs fell south and south-west of the airfield. The other two squadrons attacked the target early next morning, although three of the fourteen Beauforts sent did not reach it because of mechanical troubles. One Beaufort was circling at 3 a.m. trying to find Tobera airfield when the enemy lighted a flare path and flashed a green light to him presumably believing he was a friendly aircraft. Taking advantage of this mistake the pilot dived his machine from 10,000 to 6,000 feet and made a run along the south end of the airfield dropping bombs as he went. Flying Officer Renouf's[9] Beaufort was attacked over Wide Bay by night fighters and he was forced to jettison his bombs and return to base without attacking. At daylight on 3rd November eleven Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron, with Bostons of No. 22 and Kittyhawks of No. 77, were ordered to make a combined attack on Palmalmal plantation on Jacquinot Bay. This target was heavily bombed and strafed. A Japanese 25-mm shell struck the leading Boston (Wing Commander Townsend[1] and Pilot Officer McClymont[2]) and exploded in the bomb bay, forcing Townsend to land it immediately on a submerged coral reef 200 yards off shore. The crew, who were uninjured, paddled ashore in a dinghy, hid the dinghy and then escaped into the jungle where they got in touch with friendly natives who fed and sheltered them.[3] One of the Kittyhawks (Sergeant McDonald[4]) was also hit and on the way back to base his machine crashed into the sea. A covering pilot saw McDonald come to the surface, only to sink again.

The enemy losses in the October-November operations against Rabaul claimed by MacArthur's headquarters were lamentably exaggerated. On 29th November the American magazine *Life* published a photograph of a Mitchell bomber flying over Rabaul harbour, and underneath the photograph a caption read that in a series of raids the United States air forces had destroyed 140 vessels and 700 aircraft in and round Rabaul. Exactly

[9] F-Lt C. W. B. Renouf, 273860. 7, 13, 32 and 6 Sqns. Clerk; of Ingham, Qld; b. Ingham, 19 Apr 1921.

[1] Gp Capt W. E. Townsend, 170. Staff Offr Training, 1 Training Gp 1941-43; comd 67 Sqn 1943, 22 Sqn 1943-44, 5 OTU 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Hawthorn, 25 Apr 1916.

[2] F-Lt D. McK. McClymont, 405491. 67 and 22 Sqns. Jackeroo; of Blackall, Qld; b. Sydney, 17 Oct 1921.

[3] The natives later passed the two airmen from village to village and on two occasions pursuing Japanese nearly captured them. They lived on food stolen from gardens and on 21st December the natives delivered them to an Allied Intelligence Bureau patrol which arranged their return to safety. If it had not been for the loyalty of the natives who aided them at great risk to themselves they would probably have lost their lives.

[4] Sgt R. W. McDonald, 419203. 75 and 77 Sqns. Draftsman; of Mont Albert, Vic; b. Marrickville, NSW, 13 Nov 1923. Killed in action 3 Nov 1943.

three weeks earlier Colonel Tormey of MacArthur's staff had given "background information" to a conference of press representatives at General Headquarters, Brisbane, in which he stated that in nine raids between 10th October and 2nd November the grand total of aircraft destroyed, probably destroyed or damaged was 732 and the number of vessels sunk or destroyed 138, in and round Rabaul. Included in this figure were seven destroyers and a heavy cruiser sunk; but in fact only one destroyer was sunk by aircraft in this period. The total aircraft claimed as destroyed was 522, but in fact for the whole two months October-November and if the Solomons area is also included with Rabaul, the Japanese lost only 203 aircraft. The policy followed in this period was in contrast with the one employed when R.A.A.F. Spitfires had been involved in the relatively unsuccessful operation over Darwin on 2nd May, mentioned earlier. General MacArthur, referring to that action in a letter to Mr Curtin on 11th June, had said:

> In contrast with the Minister's (Mr Drakeford's) view that some more palliating impression should have been conveyed, it is imperative to bear in mind the complaint of the representatives of the newspapers on the Censorship Advisory Committee, who claim that too rosy a picture is presented by the communiqués. *The policy of G.H.Q. is to base the communiqué on the real facts.* We lost fourteen aircraft in this action and the enemy six for certain with four probably destroyed. Never previously have we suffered such a severe reverse in an air action in the SWPA. To follow any other course would do more to undermine the morale of the public and air personnel than to be as frank as possible without divulging information of use to the enemy.

Although the exaggeration of claims cannot be condoned, it should be pointed out that it occurred not only in the Pacific but in other war theatres. For example, in one case the American Eighth Air Force claimed that its bombers destroyed 107 German fighters in a mission over Europe whereas in fact they destroyed two.[5]

Professor Morison, the United States naval historian, later made some caustic comments about the claims made after the Fifth Air Force attack on Rabaul on 2nd November. He wrote:

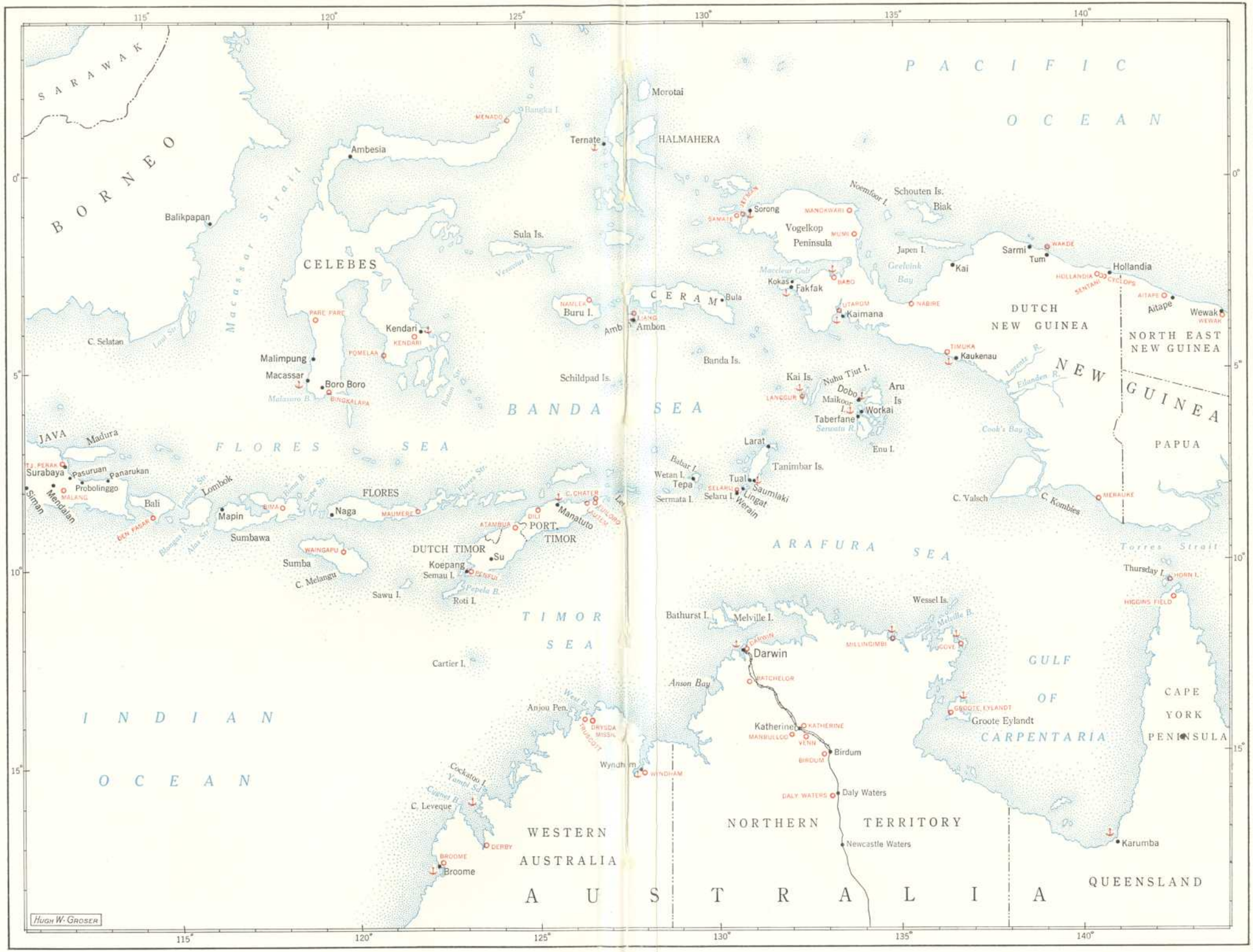
> The actual score was 20 planes destroyed, two small *Marus* totalling 4,600 tons and a 500-ton mine-sweeper sunk; doubtless some others damaged. Yet General Kenney could still write of this raid in 1949, "Never in the long history of warfare had so much destruction been wrought upon the forces of a belligerent nation so swiftly and at such little cost." Never, indeed, have such exorbitant claims been made with so little basis in fact—except by some of the Army Air Forces in Europe, and by the same Japanese air force which General Kenney believed he had wiped out. Even on that day the Japanese out-Kenneyed Kenney by claiming 22 B-25s [Mitchells] and 79 P-38s [Lightnings] as "sure kills".[6]

An American critic was later to condemn MacArthur for attempting to build up a legend of himself as a strategist without historical precedent

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[5] Correspondents at MacArthur's headquarters resented being made tools for the dissemination of false claims, but could do little about it. At press conferences the correspondents greeted the more glaring examples of exaggeration with guffaws and sardonic quips. However, under the rules of their accreditation they could not criticise communiqués, although they could and sometimes did refuse to send them to their principals.

[6] Morison, Vol VI, p. 288.




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by exaggerating the enemy's strength and losses and minimising his own. An attempted justification of this policy is that it builds up the morale of the fighting forces as well as of the people at home. The building up of military reputations may be a by-product of the policy. In fact such a policy runs a risk of damaging the morale of troops and civilians, who may discover that exaggerations are being officially circulated, lose faith in their leaders, and become resentful of what they consider the contemptuous attitude of men who will not trust them with the truth.

Admiral Koga considered that Rabaul should be held to the last so as to protect the fleet main base at Truk, but not to the extent of weakening his air and naval forces which he was trying to preserve for a decisive engagement with the main units of the American fleet. He had already sent 300 carrier aircraft which he allowed to be used in the defence of the Solomons, and a few days later, impressed with the serious situation in Bougainville, he followed this by sending Admiral Kurita with a task force of his best cruisers and destroyers with orders to destroy the American force at Empress Augusta Bay. The Allies were already aware of the fighter aircraft reinforcement of Rabaul and on 4th November one of Kenney's patrolling aircraft saw Kurita's task force south of Truk. The Allied Air Forces "situation report" next day reported that "a large enemy task force comprised of five heavy cruisers, three light cruisers and five destroyers, with four freighters and two corvettes, is proceeding to the Rabaul area from Truk". Photographs taken at midday on 5th November over Rabaul showed the following vessels in the harbour:

6 heavy cruisers
10-14 destroyers
1 tanker
12 merchant vessels
1 hospital ship

These naval reinforcements created a dangerous situation for Halsey's amphibious forces at Empress Augusta Bay, which faced possible annihilation. Halsey therefore called on his carrier task force to launch an attack from the carriers *Saratoga* and *Princeton*. Bombers from this force sank one destroyer and damaged nearly every destroyer and cruiser in the harbour. Kenney sent 27 Liberators and 67 Lightnings which arrived in the afternoon after the carrier aircraft attack. The Liberators dropped 80 tons of bombs on the waterfront area.[7]

That night, to follow up the assault on Rabaul shipping, Air Commodore Hewitt ordered four Beauforts from No. 8 Squadron to make a torpedo attack on a tanker and other enemy shipping in Keravia Bay.

[7] Halsey considered this effort was "feeble" in view of the situation at the time. In his book *Admiral Halsey's Story* (1947), p. 183, he wrote: "The last thing our pilots saw as they ducked back into the clouds . . . was Kenney's bombers, eight of them. I have always resented the feebleness of his support at this critical time, and I told General MacArthur as much the next time I saw him."

Another four Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron were to attack simultaneously at Vunakanau airfield which is near Keravia Bay. Flight Lieutenant Quinn[8] led the torpedo planes, one of which failed to leave Kiriwina because it became unserviceable. At 10.4 p.m. Quinn attacked a ship in Keravia Bay from a height of 150 feet. As he came in to attack a searchlight picked him up. He then dropped his torpedo but, because the searchlight blinded his vision, could not see if it struck the target. A second torpedo was dropped at another ship but hooked to the left and missed. A third torpedo was aimed at a cruiser and the pilot considered that he probably hit it. As the torpedo crews made for base they could see the Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron bombing Vunakanau airfield.

Hewitt, who was a former naval officer and Fleet Air Arm pilot,[9] now planned to use his Beaufort squadrons in a large-scale torpedo attack on enemy naval and merchant shipping in Rabaul. The results of Australian torpedo attacks thus far had not been encouraging. The range of the Beaufort was limited and it was overloaded when carrying a torpedo. It was a good machine but rather obsolete in design and uncomfortable for the crew. There had been criticism of the continued use of the Beaufort as a torpedo-carrying aircraft and it was felt that a well-planned large-scale attack on a good target would either make or break it as a tactical weapon, and help the R.A.A.F. leaders to decide whether to retain the expensive torpedo-bomber training establishment at Nowra in New South Wales.

Accordingly every effort was to be made to gain a success. Aircraft were held back from flights so that many would be serviceable on the day. Conferences were held and the whole operation coordinated. The final plan was for twelve Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron to attack in formation on the night of 8th November in Simpson Harbour. The torpedo bombers, aided by a diversion created by the bombing of Rapopo and Vunakanau airfields by other Beauforts, would enter the harbour in two flights of six.

In order to obtain last-minute information on the weather and the position of the Japanese ships at Rabaul a reconnaissance Beaufort was sent out late in the afternoon of 8th November, and when this machine returned after being chased by enemy fighters over Rabaul, Lieutenant Greentree,[1] naval observer who flew in it, reported that heavy rain was falling in St George's Channel and in addition the Japanese, evidently expecting torpedo attacks, had disposed their ships to prevent an attack down the moon, and had grouped their cruisers so as to be able to send up a concentrated anti-aircraft barrage against low-flying aircraft.

In conference, Greentree and the torpedo bomber flight commanders said that an attack by a formation could not succeed, and Nicoll who was

[8] W Cdr N. T. Quinn, DFC, 622. 2, 6 and 14 Sqns; comd 8 Sqn 1943. Regular air force offr; of Muswellbrook, NSW; b. Cessnock, NSW, 16 Mar 1916.

[9] Air Cmdre Hewitt was a graduate of the Royal Australian Naval College, which he entered in 1915 at the age of 13, graduating in 1919. In 1925 he went to England for attachment to the Fleet Air Arm.

[1] Lt-Cdr L. R. Greentree, DSC, RD; RANR(S). HMAS's *Hobart* 1939-40, *Westralia* 1942; 8 Sqn RAAF 1943; HMAS *Australia* 1944; 804 and 832 Sqns Fleet Air Arm 1944-45. Ship's officer; of Bexley, NSW; b. Paddington, NSW, 18 Jul 1918.

to lead the twelve torpedo bombers recommended to Hewitt that the other Beauforts which were standing by to bomb the airfields should be diverted to the shipping so that the enemy would disperse and be easier to hit with torpedoes. Hewitt agreed but Wing Commander Hannah,[2] commander of No. 6 Squadron, informed Hewitt on the telephone that his bombs were not suitable for an attack on shipping. His Beauforts were therefore sent off to bomb the original targets assigned to them. Tempers were frayed on this night during discussions outside the operations room on the Kiriwina airfield. It was a moonlit night and a map of the Rabaul area was spread out in the open on the bonnet of a jeep. The senior officers crowded round it, while the torpedo bomber crews waited in the background for the word to go.

Hewitt was clearly anxious to see the carefully-planned mission carried out and wanted to know precisely why it could not go on as planned. The lives of the crews and the future of the Beaufort torpedo bomber were at stake, and time was running out. Hewitt suggested that three aircraft could carry out the mission (originally planned for twelve). Then Nicoll, and the two flight commanders, Price and Quinn, volunteered to go. With little time to lose, they entered their aircraft and took off together at 12.30 a.m.

The three Beauforts flying in formation were forced to go through a heavy electrical storm. There was thunder and lightning, and heavy rain was falling. As they approached Rabaul they found the weather had cleared and they flew towards their target at a height of less than 100 feet in a V formation. Outside Rabaul harbour the Beauforts formed into line astern with Nicoll leading, and the pilots sent their machines at top speed over the narrow neck of land from Talili Bay into the harbour.

A barrage of anti-aircraft fire greeted them. Nicoll dropped his torpedo in the northern end of the harbour and it struck a tanker, although Nicoll himself could not see the result. Shortly afterwards, with great heroism, Price attacked a little farther south, sending his Beaufort straight towards the middle of a line of cruisers from which a tremendous barrage of missiles was soaring towards him leaving dazzling trails of blue, red and orange. Price's aircraft was hit and apparently blown to pieces. Quinn, who was behind, saw Price turn in and later saw the barrage lift as his Beaufort neared the cruisers. Quinn was diving and weaving violently to avoid the searchlights and anti-aircraft fire. Greentree, the naval observer, saw a light cruiser off Keravia Bay and guided Quinn towards it. The torpedo was dropped and in the confusion Quinn, instead of making off, turned his machine back through the anti-aircraft fire again. The anti-aircraft fire was so intense that the aircraft was filled with cordite fumes. Just before dawn Nicoll and Quinn landed back at base at Kiriwina, but ground controllers waited in vain for Price's machine and he and his

[2] Air Cmdre C. T. Hannah, CBE, 112. Comd 6 Sqn and 71 Wing 1943-44; SASO Western Area 1944-45; comd Western Area 1945. Regular air force offr; of Nedlands, WA; b. Menzies, WA, 22 Dec 1914.

crew (Flying Officer Harrison[3] and Flight Sergeants Allen[4] and Hooper[5]) were posted missing.

Two days later, however, Hewitt directed that Nicoll be posted from No. 8 Squadron to the command of No. 7 at Townsville. He then appointed Quinn to the command of No. 8 in Nicoll's place. However, a report had been sent by a senior officer of the group to R.A.A.F. Headquarters, Melbourne, reporting an unsatisfactory state of affairs in the group. R.A.A.F. Headquarters cancelled Nicoll's posting and Hewitt himself was transferred back to his earlier position of Director of Intelligence at Allied Air Forces Headquarters, Brisbane.

The transfer of the commander of the R.A.A.F's most important and active group of squadrons then heavily engaged in support of MacArthur's offensive against New Britain was a serious matter, and the Minister for Air, Mr Drakeford, considered it necessary to bring it to the attention of the Prime Minister. On 17th November he wrote to Mr Curtin:

> I am sorry to inform you that the C.A.S. has just reported to me that much dissatisfaction exists in regard to the administration of No. 9 (Operational) Group, New Guinea, by the present A.O.C.—Air Commodore J. E. Hewitt.
>
> In his submission AVM Jones has informed me that, during his recent visit to New Guinea, it was quite apparent that morale and discipline of senior officers in No. 9 (Operational) Group were suffering as the result of Air Commodore Hewitt's administration, those views being later confirmed by reports submitted by senior officers of this HQ staff after their visits to New Guinea.
>
> The C.A.S. informed the A.O.C. 9 (Operational) Group of the position, in the hope that the latter would adjust his methods, not only to ensure improvement in his administration, but also to secure the fullest cooperation of his senior officers —a condition imperatively necessary for operational efficiency and general well-being of the force.
>
> The C.A.S. has now informed me, however, that he is convinced that the situation as between the A.O.C. and his senior officers is deteriorating, under which circumstance AVM Jones has now strongly recommended that the following changes be made in appointments
>
> *a.* Air Commodore F. W. F. Lukis, C.B.E., at present Air Member for Personnel to be AOC No. 9 (Operational) Group, vice Air Commodore Hewitt.
>
> *b.* AVM W. H. Anderson, C.B.E., D.F.C., at present commandant R.A.A.F. staff school, to be AMP (vice Air Commodore Lukis).
>
> *c.* Air Commodore J. E. Hewitt, O.B.E., at present AOC 9 (Operational) Group to return to his former post of Director of Intelligence at Allied Air Headquarters.

Mr Curtin agreed to the changes and expressed concern at "the unsatisfactory state of affairs that has arisen in connection with the administration of No. 9 Operational Group". He also reminded Drakeford that he, Drakeford, had earlier proposed that Hewitt should be promoted to the post of A.O.C., R.A.A.F. Command, in place of Air Vice-Marshal Bos-

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[3] F-O A. J. Harrison, 405191; 8 Sqn. Accounts clerk; of Geebung, Qld; b. Brisbane, 17 Nov 1916. Killed in action 9 Nov 1943.

[4] F-Sgt G. W. F. S. Allen, 412875. 100 and 8 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Ashfield, NSW; b. Stanmore, NSW, 20 Aug 1921. Killed in action 9 Nov 1943.

[5] F-Sgt T. C. Hooper, 405483; 8 Sqn. Student; of Albion Heights, Qld; b. Brisbane, 19 Jan 1922. Killed in action 9 Nov 1943.

tock, adding that MacArthur had opposed this on the ground that Hewitt was not an "adequate replacement". Drakeford replied next day defending Hewitt, pointing out that he had rendered excellent service and that "the present position may be largely, if not entirely, due to some temporary physical stress brought about by the strain of his important duties as A.O.C. of No. 9 Group".

Rabaul, even after many Allied attacks, was still immensely strong, and continued to be a serious threat to Halsey. The Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron bombed Vunakanau airfield on the night of 10th November. Conditions for bombing were perfect and the crews could clearly see the airfield and dispersal bays from 10,000 feet.

In response to a request from Halsey, Admiral Nimitz had sent him three more aircraft carriers (*Independence, Essex* and *Bunker Hill*) and aircraft from these together with those from *Saratoga* and *Princeton* made more attacks on Rabaul on 11th November. Some of Kenney's bombers joined in also, and, although bad weather greatly hampered the operation, preventing a coordinated attack, the carrier aircraft sank a destroyer and damaged other ships. Admiral Kurita was forced finally to withdraw his naval task force from Rabaul and every one of his ships that could steam returned to Truk. Admiral Koga recalled the remaining carrier air groups and sent them back to Japan for reorganisation into other units. Halsey had won the day. Bougainville was safe.

Hewitt had sent two more heavy night attacks against Rabaul on 14th and 17th November, using his three squadrons of Beauforts. He directed Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron to bomb shipping in the harbour on 14th November. The pilots found three groups of ships, one in the west side of Simpson Harbour, one in the centre of the harbour and the other off Lakunai. They made two hits or very near misses on a motor vessel and two direct hits on the stern of an 8,000-ton ship. Flight Lieutenant Oates scored the two hits on the 8,000-ton ship. He singled out his target and made a gliding approach from 10,000 feet, clearing Talili Bay by 400 feet and dropping to 150 feet over the harbour. His first four bombs entered the water running up to the side of the vessel and the last two entered the vessel. Later that night seven bomb-carrying and five torpedo-carrying Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron led by Flight Lieutenant Dorward[6] also attacked the harbour. One of the Beauforts was lost. The Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron which also attacked the harbour could not see the result of their efforts.

[6] Sqn Ldr E. A. Dorward, 251607. 23, 32, 8, 35 and 37 Sqns. Airline pilot; of Brighton Beach, Vic; b. Brighton, Vic, 26 Apr 1910.

CHAPTER 7

# THE NORTH-WESTERN FLANK, AUGUST-DECEMBER 1943

IN July, after a long term—since March 1942—as Air Officer Commanding in North-Western Area, Air Commodore Bladin was posted for duty with the R.A.F. in Europe. He was replaced by Air Vice-Marshal Cole who had just returned from Europe. Cole had commanded a general reconnaissance wing in the Middle East and then served as air adviser in the Dieppe raid in 1942, during which he had been wounded. When he recovered, he became Air Officer Commanding, Royal Air Force in Northern Ireland, until his recall to Australia.

He reported on arrival in the Northern Territory that his command was "well organised, keen and in good shape". However, the future security of the area, he said, depended on three essentials:

(*a*) equipment to carry out long-range reconnaissance;

(*b*) extra long-range fighters;

(*c*) extra striking power against invasion or major raid.

Air Vice-Marshal Cole wrote to Air Vice-Marshal Bostock on 23rd July advising that he could not "guarantee the initial security of this area from an air point of view . . . the present equipment is scarcely sufficient deterrent in power to make enemy raids uneconomical. . . ."

Cole considered that the fighter strength of three Spitfire squadrons was not enough. He wrote:

> In two recent enemy raids, fighters had to be withdrawn through lack of fuel whilst the enemy was still over Commonwealth Territory. In addition the numbers are too few to provide for adequate defence against "chain raids" spaced at time intervals which will probably be the enemy's next tactical development.

The Commander of Northern Territory Force (Major-General Allen) also considered that in numbers and type, the air strength in the area was inadequate to give really effective support in repelling a possible invasion, and pointed out that there were no fighters to give cover to bombing aircraft beyond a radius of 150 miles. Both Allen and Cole considered that fighters of the P-38 (Lightning) type were needed, and that there was also a need for a system of army cooperation. Because of the increasing difficulty of supplying bases such as Millingimbi by sea and land, Cole also asked for twenty Dakota air transports to carry food and equipment to his scattered units.

There was, however, little prospect of Cole's requirements being met because of the demands of the offensive in the New Guinea-Solomons areas. He had to get the best results from the squadrons he had. Bostock pointed out that the needs of the area were well understood but with the exception of a Dutch squadron of Kittyhawks (No. 120) there was little probability of obtaining more aircraft for the area. He wrote on 29th July:

The present insurmountable difficulty lies, not in the lack of appreciation of requirements, but in the physical inability to procure the necessary aircraft. On three specific occasions during the last six months I have forcibly represented to the Commander, Allied Air Forces (General Kenney) the need for increased fighter strength in North-Western Area and, in particular, I have made requests for the allocation of one or more P-38 squadrons. The Commander Allied Air Forces is fully aware of the situation but nevertheless has determined that priority of available fighter squadrons must be given to the North-Eastern sector in the present situation.

Bostock pointed out that should the situation demand it, temporary reinforcements would be flown into the Northern Territory from the Fifth Air Force to deal with the emergency.

By August 1943 the squadrons operating in North-Western Area were:

*Australia*

No. 2, general reconnaissance, equipped with Hudsons.
No. 31, long-range fighter, equipped with Beaufighters.
No. 452, interceptor fighter, equipped with Spitfires.
No. 457, interceptor fighter, equipped with Spitfires.
No. 1 Photo Reconnaissance Unit, equipped with Lightnings and Lancers.

*United Kingdom*

No. 54, interceptor fighter, equipped with Spitfires.

*United States*

No. 528, heavy bomber, equipped with Liberators.
No. 529, heavy bomber, equipped with Liberators.
No. 530, heavy bomber, equipped with Liberators.
No. 531, heavy bomber, equipped with Liberators.

*Holland*

No. 18, medium bomber, equipped with Mitchells.

The Spitfire squadrons had lost 44 aircraft in their six months of operations although only 17 of these losses had been directly due to enemy action. By comparison enemy losses at the hands of the Spitfires had been 63 destroyed and another 13 probably destroyed. The Spitfire squadrons had been below strength after a period of intense action in late June and early July, but replacements had come from the south during the month, and there were no further losses in action because the Japanese raids had ceased. Indeed, by the end of July, enemy activity in the air was almost at a standstill.

Bostock considered that while the existing wing organisation of the Spitfire squadrons made it necessary to keep the three squadrons together in a single wing, the tactical situation in the north might call for fighter protection in several areas. He therefore asked Air Force headquarters to disband No. 1 (Fighter) Wing thus allowing the squadrons to be distributed according to operational needs. Air Force headquarters agreed to the proposal and disbanded the wing headquarters, commanded at this time by Wing Commander Caldwell who had taken over from Group Captain Walters. Headquarters directed that fighter squadrons were to come directly under North-Western Area for administration, but that

operational control of all fighter squadrons in the area was to be exercised by No. 5 Fighter Sector Headquarters. During fighter operations there had been confusion as to the functions of the wing leader and the commander of the fighter sector headquarters. Trouble arose when the ground controller on duty tried to control the fighters in the air whereas only the sector commander should give orders to the wing leader and fighter squadrons in the air.

It was considered that the new arrangement would overcome the confusion that had arisen. However, Air Force Headquarters, some months later, re-introduced the name "No. 1 (Fighter) Wing", taking the view that the difference was only a matter of title, there being no difference in function between "Fighter Wing" and "Fighter Sector Headquarters". Air Vice-Marshal Jones, in making this change said: "The uncertainty concerning the wing organisation for the fighters in Darwin has occurred through the officer commanding the wing in the past not being fully qualified to control the fighters from the Operations Room. With the posting of Wing Commander Jeffrey[2] (as commander of No. 1 (Fighter) Wing), this difficulty has been overcome."[3]

For some months the Spitfire squadrons in North-Western Area tested the "anti-G" suits developed by Professor Cotton[4] of Sydney University. The pilots found that these suits, although at first badly fitting and uncomfortable in the tropical north (pilots could actually pour sweat from their boots when the suits were taken off), were successful in reducing the tendency to "black out" during turns at high speeds and when pulling out of dives. The suits were excellent in the dog-fighting type of manoeuvre, but Spitfire pilots were not permitted to dog-fight because the advantage would lie with the more manoeuvrable enemy fighter planes. Furthermore there were never enough suits available at one time to give them a proper trial in action. For these reasons and because enemy fighters over Darwin were now becoming a rarity, the suits were never given a thorough test in operations.

After the setback caused by the enemy air raids on Fenton, No. 380 Bombardment Group slowly increased its bomber effort from fifty sorties in June to seventy-eight in July. The commander of the group, Colonel William Miller, was handicapped by lack of replacements, both of aircraft and crews. The length of service of American crews had to be extended to meet the needs of operations. Wrong weather forecasts had adversely affected operations. In July and August alone fifty sorties failed because of bad weather over the target when good weather had been forecast. The strength of the No. 380 Group was to be built up to 48

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[2] Gp Capt P. Jeffrey, DSO, DFC. 145. Comd 3 Sqn 1940-41; W Ldr 234 Wing RAF 1941; comd RAAF Stn Bankstown and 2 OTU 1942-43, 1 Wing 1943-44, 2 OTU 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Sydney; b. Tenterfield, NSW, 6 Jul 1913.

[3] The organisation of fighter control units was a source of friction between Jones and Bostock and the course of the argument it evoked is too involved and technical to be related here. At one stage Bostock appealed direct to the Minister (Mr Drakeford) on the question. The rival systems were never fully tried out since, after 1943, the RAAF was rarely engaged in defensive fighter operations.

[4] Prof F. S. Cotton. Research Prof of Physiology, Sydney University, 1941-55. Of Hornsby, NSW; b. Sydney, 30 Apr 1890. Died 23 Aug 1955.

aircraft, but during August the group had an assigned strength of 28 crews and 25 aircraft.

There had been some difficulty in achieving smooth cooperation between the Australian and American squadrons. The methods taught to the American airmen were different from the Australian. On 8th August Cole complained to Bostock that the commander of the bomber group had received an instruction direct from General Kenney not to attack targets near enemy fighters in daylight. This limitation, he claimed, gravely affected his power and affected R.A.A.F. Command orders relating to heavy-bomber operations. Bostock told Cole to disregard the instruction received by the American group commander and on 10th August, Kenney informed Bostock that he had no knowledge of any instruction limiting the use of the Liberators. However, he "expected Cole to use his head in regard to ordering daylight strikes in that sector. Obviously bombers unescorted by fighters should not be dispatched to make daylight attacks on targets known to be heavily defended by enemy fighters." Kenney also directed that no strikes were to be ordered in which fewer than six Liberators took part.

We know now that, beginning on 10th August, Japanese air regiments of the *7th Air Division* began to withdraw from Ambon to Wewak. This movement was aided by the completion of the air route between the Arafura Sea bases and northern New Guinea. The movement out of Ambon took place at the same time that other *Fourth Air Army* units moved out of Rabaul to Wewak, and was in accordance with the Japanese policy of concentrating army air squadrons in New Guinea, and navy air squadrons in the Rabaul-Solomons area.

However, the *23rd Air Flotilla* remained in the islands north of Darwin with its headquarters at Kendari and forward bases at Penfui, Ambon, and in the Kai Islands. Enemy float-planes also continued to harry Allied shipping moving through Torres Strait and the Arafura Sea. The enemy maintained this activity in spite of repeated attacks on their base at Taberfane in the Aru Islands by Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron. In August the Beaufighters, in addition to attacking the float-plane base, were also assigned to protecting ships from the float-planes. They operated out of their base at Coomalie Creek and staged through Millingimbi airfield.

On 6th August two float-planes bombed the steamer *Macumba* (2,526 tons) while the vessel was on its way from Thursday Island to Darwin. A bomb struck the *Macumba* in the engine room and the escorting naval vessel, *Cootamundra,* decided to take the vessel in tow. Three Beaufighters of No. 31 had been detailed to give cover for these vessels, but the rain and cloud were so bad that the first two aircraft had not been able to find the convoy. The float-planes attacked the convoy while the Beaufighters searched for it. Immediately after the attack *Cootamundra* radioed for more Beaufighters to cover her while she towed *Macumba.* However, during the day *Macumba* sank.

The radar station reported that a daily reconnaissance was being made in the Millingimbi area by float-planes, and on 10th August two Spitfires of No. 452 Squadron, based at Millingimbi to provide protection for shipping, fired on a float-plane which was hit and plunged on fire into the sea. Another one escaped after being hit, but appeared to have little chance of surviving the return flight to its base at Taberfane.

Cole ordered further attacks by Beaufighters on the base at Taberfane. The next day nine Beaufighters led by Squadron Leader Gordon[5] went to Millingimbi where they refuelled and then flew on to Taberfane. The weather was misty and heavy rain was falling. The Beaufighters flew at a height of fifty feet after passing Enu Island and then climbed to 1,000 feet for the run in towards the target. These tactics did not, however, take the enemy by surprise. Gordon, who was first to arrive, saw a Pete in the air at 300 feet near the beach used by the float-planes. He attacked it and caused some damage. In the next ten minutes three of the Beaufighters were dog-fighting with five enemy aircraft. The enemy succeeded in driving the Beaufighters away from the float-plane beach. Four of the enemy attacked Gordon, who broke off the engagement, called his Beaufighters together and returned to base, where all arrived undamaged except one machine piloted by Flying Officer Mitchell[6] which had been hit in the mainplane by enemy fire.

The Beaufighter squadron was a well-led, high-spirited and successful unit. It attacked Taberfane again on 17th August, this time with greater success, shooting down one Pete and three Rufes which they fought in the air over the base. Flight Lieutenant Entwistle,[7] who led the flight, reported later: "I saw a Rufe and a Pete each at 12 o'clock and 300 feet high. I attacked the Pete firing from 300 yards, head on, and closing right up. The Pete crashed into the water and was destroyed." Sergeant Kilpatrick,[8] who destroyed a Rufe, reported: "I came in formation with my flight leader (Entwistle) and saw a Pete and a Rufe airborne and a Rufe taking off from the float-plane beach. I pulled up to 1,000 feet in a left-hand turn and attacked a Rufe over the beach firing from 500 yards to 100 yards. Shells burst on the wing roots and with large clouds of black smoke trailing the Rufe crashed into the coconuts and burned." Kilpatrick then turned his cannons on another Rufe which was attacking Entwistle. He diverted it and having by then run short of fuel flew back to Millingimbi. Flight Lieutenant Willard[9] and Flight Sergeant Warren[1] who took part in this operation, flew their Beaufighters along the Serwatu River and came on a lugger flanked by two motor-launches. The two

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[5] Sqn Ldr R. L. Gordon, DFC, 485. 24 and 31 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Coogee, NSW; b. Sydney, 6 Jul 1917. Killed in action 27 Feb 1944.

[6] F-Lt L. B. Mitchell, 412171. 18 and 31 Sqns. Salesman; of Roseville, NSW; b. Rose Bay, NSW, 19 Aug 1917.

[7] F-Lt J. D. Entwistle, DFC, 250796. 31, 21 and 22 Sqns. Commercial pilot; of South Yarra, Vic; b. Adelaide, 18 Jun 1919.

[8] F-O R. J. Kilpatrick, 409717; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of East Malvern, Vic; b. East Malvern, 19 Mar 1920.

[9] F-Lt W. E. Willard, 472. 30 and 31 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Waverley, NSW; b. Waverley, 4 Feb 1921. Killed in action 30 Aug 1943.

[1] F-O V. T. J. Warren, 411974; 31 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Goulburn, NSW; b. Goulburn, 12 Feb 1918.

pilots dived on them firing their cannon. They saw some forty to fifty Japanese jumping into the water and swimming shorewards. The Beaufighters flew up and down machine-gunning the vessels and the Japanese, and it appeared that only about twenty of them reached the shore.

The Beaufighters' victory on this day was followed by a disaster a few days later, when on 21st August six of them were ordered to attack Taberfane again. They destroyed two Rufes and damaged two Petes on this day. Competition among crews for "kills" was keen and two of the Beaufighters (Flight Lieutenant Gardiner[2] and Flying Officer Leithhead[3]), which had been acting as top cover, dived together from 2,500 feet to attack a Pete which was just taking off from the float-plane beach. Their machines were seen by other pilots converging towards the Pete. Evidently the two pilots, eager to attack and concentrating on their quarry, did not notice each other and they collided. The force of the impact tore off the mainplanes of both Beaufighters, the port engines caught fire and both crashed burning into the bay 400 yards off Taberfane village. The machines then disappeared below the water and none of the four men in the crews came to the surface.

The enemy had been intercepting Liberators from the Darwin area over Balikpapan, Koepang and in southern Celebes, as well as challenging the Beaufighters at the float-plane base at Taberfane. Three times in August the Liberators attacked Balikpapan, the important oil-refining town in Borneo, as well as Ambon. One of the Liberators crash-landed on a salt pan on the Anjou Peninsula near Drysdale after returning from a raid on Balikpapan on 14th August. This was the first attack on Balikpapan from Australia, and the Liberators flew 2,620 miles, remaining aloft more than sixteen hours.

The Japanese had not sent aircraft, other than high-flying reconnaissance planes, against the Northern Territory since early July. On 13th August, however, evidently unwilling to risk daylight attacks against certain interception by the Spitfire squadrons, they attempted a night raid. About 9.30 in the evening eighteen enemy aircraft, divided into three groups, were detected coming in. Two groups went to Fenton airfield and dropped their bombs there without causing damage and the other group flew over Batchelor, then over Hughes, where they dropped a flare. The group then proceeded to Coomalie Creek where they dropped about twenty bombs including aerial burst and incendiaries. Again, there was neither damage nor casualties.

The alert was sounded in Darwin when men of the three Spitfire squadrons were holding parties to celebrate the arrival of the fighter wing in Australia twelve months before. Supper was about to begin for No. 457 Squadron when the men were ordered to take shelter in trenches. A number of Spitfires of No. 54 Squadron were on a night-training

[2] F-Lt F. J. Gardiner, 407575; 31 Sqn. Miner; of Broken Hill, NSW; b. Broken Hill, 4 Mar 1920. Killed in action 21 Aug 1943.

[3] F-O V. C. Leithhead, 406858. 14 and 31 Sqns. Civil servant; of Victoria Park, WA; b. Subiaco, WA, 23 Jan 1921. Killed in action 21 Aug 1943.

exercise at the time of the raid and tried to intercept the raiders but without result. Another six Spitfires from the squadron and two from No. 452 went up to join in the hunt but returned without success.

The enemy air force continued to send high-flying reconnaissance aircraft over the Darwin area. On the morning of 20th August three arrived. No. 457 was duty squadron, and Squadron Leader James, the commanding officer, destroyed one of the enemy over Fenton airfield. He fired three bursts into the aircraft and saw it hit the ground where it burned. Flight Lieutenant P. H. Watson chased another one near Anson Bay. He fired a long burst from his cannons and both motors of the enemy aircraft began to smoke. It then blew up covering Watson's Spitfire with oil. Watson was so close that he was forced to break away violently to avoid striking flying debris. The wreckage blew up again when about 5,000 feet from the ground. Pilot Officers Jenkins[4] and R. W. Watson attacked a third and sent it down in flames over Bathurst Island from which wreckage and the bodies of two Japanese airmen were later recovered.

The failure of the three reconnaissance aircraft to return evidently prompted the Japanese commander to send another aircraft over Darwin in the afternoon. A Dinah was detected at 3.30 p.m. when about 20 miles north-west of Darwin, and Wing Commander Caldwell, with Flight Sergeant Padula[5] as his Number Two, took off to intercept. Guided by radar reports they headed towards Point Charles where they saw the enemy aircraft at a distance of about 12 miles flying at 26,000 feet at a speed of about 300 miles an hour. Caldwell overtook the raider 20 miles from the coast and opened fire with all his guns and cannon when he was within 200 yards. One of the raider's engines caught fire and pieces of debris from it hit Caldwell's Spitfire. Padula then fired on and hit the raider. Caldwell followed the doomed machine down until it splashed into the water. He circled for a time and saw the body of a Japanese in a black flying suit and helmet, lying spreadeagled on top of the water, face upward.

On 21st August a force of some eighteen Japanese bombers raided the Northern Territory airfields again at night, dropping bombs near Coomalie, Fenton and Pell airfields. Men at the airfields were ordered to trenches, while five Spitfires from No. 452, and five from No. 54, went up but failed to find the raiders. Conditions at the time were hazy and there was only a half moon. The enemy crews evidently had difficulty in finding their targets because they spent a great deal of time flying round before dropping bombs. These caused little damage or injury.

The enemy reconnaissance aircraft which came over Darwin by daylight had rarely escaped destruction, and the Japanese therefore decided to protect them. On 7th September they sent a twin-engined aircraft heavily escorted by fighters. The first warning of this reconnaissance in force came at 8.30 a.m. when the enemy planes were 180 miles from Darwin. Twelve

[4] F-Lt J. R. Jenkins, 405210. 452 and 457 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Newmarket, Qld; b. Maryborough, Qld, 22 Jan 1921.

[5] F-Lt P. A. Padula, 411813. 167 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn. Assistant hotel manager; of Cobar, NSW; b. Brisbane, 5 Apr 1917.

aircraft of No. 457 were ordered to go to exit points to intercept. The radar operators thought at first that only one aircraft was coming, but soon it was clear that many were on their way, and a total of 48 Spitfires took to the air.

While the Spitfires of Nos. 54 and 452 were near Port Patterson the pilots saw 21 enemy aircraft 16 miles west of Sattler and at a higher altitude. The enemy fighters attacked before these Spitfires could gain a height advantage. In the affray which followed one enemy fighter was destroyed and two probably destroyed. A Spitfire pilot (Flying Officer Hinds[6]) was shot down and killed, while two others (Squadron Leader MacDonald, commander of No. 452, and Pilot Officer Tully[7]) were shot down but escaped by parachute. A cannon shell from a Japanese fighter exploded in the cockpit of MacDonald's machine and he suffered serious burns before baling out. He was found later and returned to the R.A.A.F. Medical Receiving Station in a Tiger Moth aircraft flown by Squadron Leader Fenton.[8]

Immediately after this clash, No. 457, which had been airborne earlier and had a height advantage, carried out a successful attack on the enemy aircraft, shooting down four Zekes and damaging others. All Spitfires from this squadron returned undamaged to base. Flight Lieutenants Watson and MacLean and Flying Officer Smithson[9] shot down one Zeke each, while Flight Sergeant White[1] and Flying Officer Gregory[2] shared in the destruction of another.

Within the limits of the air strength allotted to him Air Vice-Marshal Cole was to aid General MacArthur's advance to Lae-Nadzab and New Britain. MacArthur had told Cole in general terms what he proposed to do in New Guinea in 1943, and asked Cole what he could do in North-Western Area in support. Cole had five main duties. They were: firstly, air protection of the base by day and night; secondly, reconnaissance to seaward to give 36 hours warning of major raids or invasions; thirdly, protection of shipping; fourthly, interference with Japanese airfields; and fifthly, interference with enemy shipping. After carrying out these duties, North-Western Area could do little more until additional squadrons were assigned. However, by reducing reconnaissance, it was possible to strike at a wider diversity of targets. Some days before the Lae-Nadzab operation was to begin, Kenney told Cole about it, and it was left for Cole to increase his bombing activity to the limit. Accord-

[6] F-O W. T. Hinds, 129948 RAF. 234 and 54 Sqns RAF. Student; of Smarden, Kent, Eng; b. Ashford, Kent, Eng, 15 Dec 1921. Killed in action 7 Sep 1943.

[7] F-Lt P. D. Tully, 404998; 452 Sqn. Grazier; of Quilpie, Qld; b. Brisbane, 14 Jun 1917.

[8] Sqn Ldr C. C. Fenton, OBE, 261462. 34 Sqn; comd 6 Commn Unit 1942-45. Medical practitioner; of Katherine, NT; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 16 May 1901. Well known as the Katherine "flying doctor" in the 'thirties.

[9] F-Lt J. H. Smithson, DFC, 401252. 616 Sqn RAF, 457 Sqn. Fitter; of Oakleigh, Vic; b. Seddon, Vic, 22 Oct 1918.

[1] F-O F. C. White, 403614. 452 Sqn, 41 Sqn RAF, 457 Sqn. Carpenter; of Seaforth, NSW; b. Sydney, 19 Mar 1916.

[2] F-Lt R. H. W. Gregory, 401944. 610 and 54 Sqns RAF, 457 Sqn. Chemist; of Brighton Beach, Vic; b. Yarragan, Vic, 15 Oct 1915.

ingly, day and night, late in August and during September, North-Western Area sent Mitchells, Liberators, Hudsons, Beaufighters and Catalinas on bombing and strafing missions designed to bluff the enemy and wear his strength down by constant harassment and destruction, and force him to retain fighters which might otherwise be sent to Wewak and Rabaul to check the Allied advance in New Guinea. The enemy continued to keep forward bases supplied and in doing so lost aircraft, men, shipping and material from attacks by the squadrons of North-Western Area.

On 30th August, five Beaufighters attacking Taberfane, shot down a Pete and strafed a 100-ton vessel off Workai village. On the night of 31st August, Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron bombarded Taberfane and Langgur. Next day, Liberators of Nos. 529 and 530 Squadrons struck at Bima (Sumbawa) and Waingapu (Samba), while Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron bombed and strafed Manatuto (Timor) and Naga (Flores) villages. Four Catalinas from the newly-formed No. 43 Squadron staged from their base at Karumba (at the south-eastern end of the Gulf of Carpentaria) to bomb Langgur on 8th September. On 14th September, Beaufighters, Hudsons, Catalinas and Liberators all bombed a variety of targets.

The enemy's reply to this constant attack was to mount two more night raids on Northern Territory bases. About fifteen enemy bombers were over Fenton at a height of about 21,000 feet on 15th September. They dropped bombs which did some damage. Five Spitfires of No. 54 were sent up to attack them but failed to find the raiders. On 19th September another nine bombers attacked Fenton—the sixty-third raid on the Northern Territory since the beginning of the Pacific War. No damage was caused and again Spitfires sent to intercept them were unable to find the enemy bombers.

On 27th September, the Japanese made a surprise daylight raid on Drysdale River Mission and the near-by airfield occupied by No. 58 Operational Base Unit. The airfield and facilities had been used for some time as a staging base for R.A.A.F. aircraft proceeding on reconnaissance and bombing missions to Koepang and Penfui. The Japanese raiding force comprised 21 Lily bombers of the Army Air Service escorted by a flight of Zeke navy fighters. No. 317 Radar Station at the old mission picked up the bombers at 9.56 a.m. and thirty minutes later saw the bombers flying directly overhead. Meanwhile, the alarm had been given and everyone was sheltering in trenches. The bombers opened fire with machine-guns and continued machine-gunning while they dropped their bombs on the main runway. They caused no casualties but destroyed the armourer's hut where for some time afterwards ammunition could be heard exploding. Part of the bomber force then wheeled towards the Drysdale Mission where one of the bombers made a direct hit on a slit trench killing Father Thomas and five aborigines who were sheltering in it. Four buildings marked with the Red Cross were also destroyed. The enemy force then formed up and left on the return journey to Timor.

A party of R.A.A.F. men helped the mission fathers to put fires out and dig graves for the dead. It was considered that the interest of the enemy in Drysdale may have been aroused by the constant shuttling of aircraft between Darwin and Drysdale after the crash-landing of a Liberator on Anjou Peninsula in August. The Liberator was salvaged and flew from the area back to Fenton the day before the raid. Since there were no R.A.A.F. fighters in the area and the bombers were too high for the light anti-aircraft weapons, the enemy was not challenged and suffered no loss or even damage.

Wedged between the main concentration of Allied squadrons in New Guinea and the squadrons in the Northern Territory, were two R.A.A.F. squadrons which carried out the threefold task of guarding Horn Island at the extreme tip of Cape York Peninsula; Merauke, a desolate marshy little port in Dutch New Guinea; and the waters of the Torres Strait area which connect the Coral Sea to the Arafura Sea.

Torres Strait Force provided the garrison, and the R.A.A.F. provided air defence against both air and sea attack. No. 7 (Beaufort) Squadron, based on Horn Island, gave protection to shipping convoys and No. 84 (Boomerang) Squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Ford,[3] arrived in April 1943 to provide fighter protection. North-Eastern Area, under the command of Air Commodore Cobby, directed operations. In early 1943 the enemy was considered capable of bombing or even invading the Torres Strait area, and General MacArthur desired warning of and protection against any such operation. His ELKTON plan for the offensive in New Guinea therefore provided for the building up and garrisoning of an air base at Merauke.

In mid-1942 American engineers had begun construction of an airfield at Merauke, but before the work was completed the engineers were withdrawn to carry out more urgently needed work elsewhere. No. 40 Radar Station had been sent to Merauke in 1942 and frequently during 1942 and early 1943 the radar equipment picked up enemy formations and single aircraft approaching the area. Between 10th and 15th December a total of 42 enemy aircraft made reconnaissance flights over the area, and on 31st December 22 bombers attacked the town and airfield.

The defence of Merauke had been discussed at an Advisory War Council meeting on 25th January 1943. MacArthur had told the council that there were two A.I.F. companies at Merauke, but he did not have the resources to occupy the town in force. Furthermore, the Japanese had command of the sea in the region if they chose to use it.

In March General Blamey had written to General MacArthur recommending that construction of the airfield be completed. He had pointed out that the Japanese were developing the Kaukenau-Timuka area and showing constant interest in Merauke. If the Japanese captured Merauke the airfield could readily be placed in action, and as a Japanese forward

[3] Air Cmdre N. Ford, OBE, AFC, 113. Chief Flying Instructor, Central Flying School 1940-42; comd 84 Sqn 1943-44, RAAF Stn Pt Cook 1945. Regular air force offr; of Largs Bay, SA; b. Adelaide, 15 Jul 1914.

air base, it would threaten MacArthur's flank. In reply, on 26th March, MacArthur had informed Blamey that his recommendation had already been incorporated in a newly-approved plan (mentioned earlier in this volume) for the defence of the Torres Strait area: Merauke was to be occupied as an air operations base. In April at Garbutt airfield, Townsville, the R.A.A.F. formed No. 72 Wing Headquarters, commanded by Group Captain C. Eaton, which was ordered to Merauke, where the advanced headquarters of the wing arrived on the 28th of that month.

Meanwhile, No. 84 Squadron, operating from Horn Island, was carrying out patrols over Merauke. This squadron was the first equipped with the Australian-made Boomerang fighter aircraft to undertake an operational task. Merauke was 180 nautical miles from Horn Island, and because of their limited range the Boomerangs could remain over Merauke only for an hour during each sortie. On 8th May Eaton directed the squadron to maintain a standing patrol of two aircraft over Merauke during the daylight hours. In addition it was to provide cover for all shipping within a radius of 20 miles of Merauke. The Boomerangs continued their patrols without incident until 16th May when they made their first interception of enemy aircraft. Two Boomerangs piloted by Flying Officer Johnstone[4] and Sergeant Stammer[5] saw three Japanese Betty bombers and opened fire, pressing the attack to within 250 yards. The guns of one Boomerang failed to fire, but the other fired a one-and-a-half-second burst. The enemy replied with fire from the turret and tail guns without hitting the Boomerangs and then withdrew into clouds.

A Beaufort of No. 7, captained by Flying Officer Hopton,[6] on patrol over Torres Strait on 26th June, saw an indication of an enemy plane on its radar screen at about six miles distance. The Beaufort captain made off in the direction of the indication and saw an enemy float-plane which he attacked. The enemy plane caught fire at the wing root and dived towards the sea. The Beaufort followed, machine-gunning, and the crew saw the float-plane crash into the sea.

Towards the end of June the airfield at Merauke was at last completed, and on 30th June the first aircraft landed on it. On 2nd and 3rd July twenty-three Kittyhawks of No. 86 Squadron arrived at Merauke to provide fighter defence for the base. The commanding officer of this squadron, which had been formed earlier at Gawler in South Australia, was Squadron Leader Meehan. By July the force at Merauke had been considerably strengthened, as described earlier. There were now 4,200 men there of whom 3,500 were of the Australian Army and 700 of the R.A.A.F.

In May R.A.A.F. Command had ordered No. 12 (Dive Bomber) Squadron from the Northern Territory to Merauke where it was to operate under the command of No. 72 Wing. A ground party of 270

[4] F-Lt R. W. Johnstone, 405740. 23 and 84 Sqns. Jackeroo; of Barcaldine, Qld; b. Winton, Qld, 18 Jul 1920.

[5] F-O M. F. J. Stammer, 425067; 84 Sqn. Tarmac hand; of Kedron, Qld; b. Sydney, 21 Apr 1923.

[6] F-Lt P. P. A. Hopton, DFC, 416024. 7 and 100 Sqns, 8 Commn Unit. Ecclesiastical student; of North Adelaide; b. Burra, SA, 28 Aug 1920.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

The convoy which carried R.A.A.F. personnel to the Aitape landing moving in to the beach at dawn on 22nd April 1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

R.A.A.F. and American commanders confer at Aitape about operating Australian and American aircraft from the Tadji airstrip. Left to right: Air Cmdre F. R. W. Scherger, Brig-General Paul B. Wurtsmith, Col Leif J. Sverdrup, ————, W Cdr W. A. C. Dale, Lieut-General Walter Krueger and Gp Capt C. D. Candy.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

With the port aileron torn completely away, and less than 75 per cent of the wing surface intact, this Kittyhawk of No. 75 Squadron, was flown over 200 miles back to Noemfoor Island on 9th August 1944. Here F-O T. R. Jacklin, who piloted the aircraft examines the damage and counts his luck.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Ground staff of No. 76 Squadron service the guns of a Kittyhawk at Noemfoor after it had returned from a strike in late 1944. Left to right: Sgt A. L. Stobbs, and Cpls H. Groth and A. G. Easlea.

arrived on 8th July, but by 15th July not a single building for the squadron had been even commenced because of shortage of materials. The aircraft and crews of the squadron had therefore to remain behind at Cooktown, Queensland, whence they were used in anti-submarine patrols and the escort of shipping—tasks for which the aircraft were not suited. However, No. 72 Wing had an operational base unit (No. 44), a medical receiving station and mobile fighter sector at the base ready for duty by July.

On 27th July an enemy bomber accompanied by three fighters approached the area and sixteen Kittyhawks took off to intercept them. The warning given of the approach of the enemy was only fifteen minutes and this was not enough to allow the Kittyhawks to reach sufficient height. The enemy aircraft were seen but escaped into clouds before the Kittyhawks could overtake them. However, by 2nd September, another radar station (No. 316) was set up at Cape Kombies, 120 miles west of Merauke. Warnings given by this station of hostile planes approaching would enable the Kittyhawks at Merauke to gain sufficient height for effective interception.

A week later, on 9th September, the Cape Kombies station detected enemy aircraft approaching Merauke when they were still 200 miles off, and plotted them right to the village. The enemy force comprised 16 Betty bombers escorted by 16 fighters. At 10.30 a.m., 14 Kittyhawks, led by Meehan, took off from the airfield followed four minutes later by four Boomerangs of No. 84, led by Flight Lieutenant Brown.[7] The enemy approached at a height of 20,000 feet. Eight of the enemy fighters were in front and on each side of the bombers, while another eight were above and well behind them acting as rear cover. The Kittyhawks attacked only the rear fighters. Only four of the 14 Kittyhawks were free of gun trouble during the engagement; because of oil thickening a total of 41 guns failed completely or partially to fire. However, Flight Lieutenant Stark[8] and Flying Officer Tucker[9] both shot down a Zeke while Flying Officer Stuart[1] destroyed an Oscar.

There were no R.A.A.F. losses. The four Boomerang aircraft did not reach the enemy. Meanwhile the bombers had attacked the airfield, making three hits on the landing strip, causing one minor casualty, and destroying a Boomerang aircraft in its dispersal bay. The damage to the airfield was repaired in less than an hour.

On 20th September a Beaufort of No. 7 Squadron, captained by Flying Officer Legge,[2] discovered a Jake float-plane while on patrol 42 miles

[7] Sqn Ldr K. R. Brown, 280701. 1 PRU, 84 Sqn; comd 75 Sqn 1944-45. Grocer; of Hyde Park, SA; b. Hyde Park, 24 Oct 1916.

[8] Sqn Ldr C. W. Stark, AFC, 576. 12, 13, 22, 24, 86 and 76 Sqns; comd 77 Sqn 1944. Regular air force offr; of Taren Point, NSW; b. Canterbury, NSW, 28 Jun 1919. Killed in aircraft accident (Empire Test Pilots' Course, UK) 13 Apr 1950.

[9] F-Lt A. D. Tucker, 405432. 75 and 86 Sqns. School teacher; of Margate Beach, Qld; b. Brisbane, 5 Mar 1920.

[1] F-Lt H. W. Stuart, 270841. 76, 86 and 82 Sqns. School teacher; of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Toowoomba, 6 Mar 1920.

[2] F-Lt J. L. Legge, 408854. 7, 67 and 2 Sqns. School teacher; of Glen Iris, Vic; b. Murchison, Vic, 11 Jul 1916.

west of Cape Valsch. Unobserved by the Japanese, Legge closed on the enemy aircraft from the rear and engaged it with machine-gun fire. The Jake was forced to alight on the water and the pilot dived overboard. As all forward-firing guns had jammed, Legge then tried unsuccessfully to finish the aircraft by bombing. In the meantime, the navigator had managed to clear a gun, so the Beaufort went down to 100 feet and the Jake was set on fire and destroyed.

No. 12 arrived at length during September and on 28th September began standing patrol duties. On 9th October a Vengeance pilot saw an enemy float-plane which he attacked with machine-gun fire at long range but the float-plane escaped into cloud. No. 12 was employed almost entirely on patrol work, flying a daily patrol to Cape Valsch, up the coast to Cook's Bay and then back to Merauke. Apart from the clash with a float-plane on 9th October they had no direct contact with the enemy.[3]

Enemy activity in the Merauke-Torres Strait area was slight after September. Occasionally patrol planes appeared and one of these was shot down by a Beaufort of No. 7 on 11th November, 66 miles south-west of Cape Valsch. No. 84 at Horn Island was re-equipped with Kittyhawks in October and in the same month was incorporated into a new wing (No. 75) formed to take charge of all units at Horn Island, Thursday Island and Higgins Field. Because of the absence of enemy activity both No. 86 and No. 84 had little to do. The Merauke airfield, however, was useful for staging aircraft to carry out bombing attacks on Dutch New Guinea and in November and December, Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron, Beauforts of No. 7 and Kittyhawks of No. 84 staged through for strikes on enemy positions, chiefly Timuka and Kaukenau. No. 86 also took part in these missions.

In the last few days of 1943 the Cape Kombies radar station plotted a Japanese aircraft regularly making a landfall at Cape Valsch and then heading towards the Gulf of Carpentaria, and the commander of No. 86 decided to send two Kittyhawks to Cape Valsch to attempt to catch this aircraft. As a result, on 22nd January, Flight Lieutenant Stuart intercepted a Betty and shot it down. The following day two Kittyhawks were flying in the same area and saw another Betty accompanied by a fighter. Flight Lieutenant Whittle[4] shot down the Zeke and together with Flight Sergeant Kerrison[5] also destroyed the Betty. The Kittyhawks continued patrolling the area for another four days but the enemy did not come again. This squadron also destroyed four enemy barges at the mouth of the Lorentz River on 31st January. These had been used the day before for an attack on an army post on the Eilanden River; the Kittyhawks attacked next morning and sank all the barges by strafing.

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[3] This squadron ceased operations on 9 June 1944, and towards the end of that month all the Vengeances were flown south to Strathpine (Queensland).

[4] Sqn Ldr R. J. C. Whittle, DFM, 404009. 250 Sqn RAF, 86 Sqn. Pharmaceutical chemist; of Murwillumbah, NSW; b. Brisbane, 10 Jul 1914.

[5] F-O S. T. Kerrison, 408373. 86 Sqn, 114 FCU. Carpenter; of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 22 Sep 1922.

Although the Merauke and Horn Island squadrons had relatively slight contact with the enemy in 1943 they fulfilled a very useful purpose in conjunction with the North-Western Area squadrons in securing the flank of MacArthur's forces.

In October, North-Western Area squadrons continued to support the New Guinea offensive by destroying as much of the enemy strength as possible in the Netherlands East Indies.

No. 31 Squadron led by Gordon went on an armed reconnaissance to Selaru on 9th October. Gordon was attacked by a twin-engined enemy fighter. He jettisoned the bombs he was carrying, chased the enemy fighter at a speed of 250 knots, made a determined attack, closing to within twenty-five yards, and shot it down into the sea. Return fire hit Gordon's machine in the mainplane and tore an exhaust ring off an engine. Gordon then strafed a twenty-foot power barge. Some minutes later he saw an enemy fighter attacking other Beaufighters in the formation. Gordon chased this machine firing on it from 350 yards and saw it burn and crash into the sea 15 miles off Selaru. One of Gordon's engines later went out of action. He tested his landing gear over Bathurst Island and found this was out of order too but succeeded in making a crash-landing at Livingstone, Northern Territory, and both he and his navigator (Sergeant Jordan[6]) escaped injury. Another Beaufighter on this mission had also shot down an enemy fighter.

The Hudsons of No. 2 Squadron and Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron continued nightly attacks on Koepang, Lautem, Fuiloro, Langgur, and other targets. Catalinas of Nos. 11, 20 and 43 Squadrons coming from Cairns and Karumba, Queensland, bombed Ambon on a number of occasions in October and November. On the night of 18th October two of the Catalinas attempted a torpedo attack on a 2,000-ton vessel in Ambon, but failed to hit it.

Four Liberators which reached Pomelaa, in Celebes, on 25th October after eight other machines had turned back because of technical faults or engine failure, put up a magnificent running fight against some ten enemy fighters which intercepted. Two of the Liberators were shot down but four members of one crew were rescued later. In a letter to the commander of the heavy-bomber group some days later Cole urged that loose defensive formation should be maintained throughout such operations and this formation should be capable of being tightened to give maximum gun-power protection when the formation was attacked. He said that the main purpose of North-Western Area at the time was to reconnoitre and attack enemy targets without casualties; combat was to be avoided.

Technical and supply difficulties were limiting the efforts of North-Western Area during the last three months of 1943. A number of Boomerang aircraft of No. 83 Squadron arrived from the south to do

[6] F-O R. S. Jordan, DFM, 421681; 31 Sqn. Butcher; of Macksville, NSW; b. South Grafton, NSW, 11 Nov 1923.

duty in defence of Millingimbi, but none could be used for operations because of technical faults. By December however six of them were ready for duty and they were used to protect shipping convoys. No. 2 was very short of serviceable aircraft. (Ultimately this squadron was to be re-armed with Beaufort aircraft.) Great difficulty was also experienced in keeping No. 31 up to its strength in aircraft. Bomb racks had been fitted to the Beaufighters and during November they made frequent bombing attacks, especially against the Tanimbar Islands.

After being quiet during October, the enemy sent nine aircraft over Darwin and Fenton in the early hours of 12th November. Three aircraft from No. 457 and six from No. 54 took off to attempt interception. Smithson, who was patrolling over Darwin harbour, was told to prepare to meet enemy aircraft entering the Darwin area. Shortly afterwards he saw reflected bomb bursts through the clouds over Darwin and then three bombers in a V formation 1,000 feet below him. He immediately gave chase, lost them, and then saw them again illuminated in a searchlight directly in front. Losing height to dead astern he opened fire on a bomber which dropped vertically. He attacked another which caught fire and dived away. He followed it down for a short distance and then attempted to find the third bomber, but it escaped.

Apart from this encounter there was little for the Spitfire squadrons to do and the pilots again became impatient. The chances of heavy raids were becoming more remote because of the movement of a large part of the enemy air strength to the Central Pacific. According to one diarist Spitfire pilots were beginning to regard "readiness" as a term meaning "monotonous hours waiting for nothing".

Through October and November the radar station at Drysdale continued to register plots of enemy aircraft, though none came in to bomb the airfield. An enemy reconnaissance aircraft was over the area for one hour and a half on 3rd November at a height of 20,000 feet. Fearing another raid on Drysdale, North-Western Area sent a flight of six Spitfires from Livingstone to Drysdale. Two days later an enemy reconnaissance plane was over again. The six Spitfires took off and came close enough to fire, but the enemy managed to escape. The Spitfires were "scrambled" often until the end of 1943 but as a rule the cause of the alarm proved to be friendly aircraft. The thunderstorms, humidity, heat and torrential rains of the monsoon season began in November, causing a reduction of air operations. In one day seven inches of rain fell at Drysdale airfield making the runway unusable and bringing down telephone lines. Operations and training had often to be cancelled.

In spite of difficult weather Beaufighters and Mitchells carried out a notable attack on Japanese shipping in December. On 15th December eight Beaufighters of No. 31 led by Gordon went on a harassing mission to Timor. The Beaufighters went first to Drysdale airfield on 14th December, and, taking off early next morning, arrived over Timor just before dawn, having flown the last 100 miles at zero height. After landfall they flew over the hills to Manatuto on the north coast where they machine-

gunned and sank two barges and damaged six schooners. Gordon then saw a convoy of cargo ships escorted by a destroyer. He reported later: "Six airplanes made one strafing run each on the transports opening up on the waterline amidships and then raking the deck and superstructure. Many troops and crew were killed and some jumped overboard." The Beaufighters next attacked a small vessel of about 500 tons and sank it, and then ranged over Timor. Its cultivated fields were green and fresh from the rains and the crews could see cattle, buffalo and ponies grazing. They attacked Atambua airfield, machine-gunning anti-aircraft positions, and fired on a group of twenty Japanese troops in a military camp.

On arrival at base Gordon reported the presence of the shipping convoy off Timor, and Cole ordered No. 18 to send as many Mitchells as possible to attack it. Flown by their Dutch crews, five Mitchells took off in the afternoon, found the convoy, and all five aircraft attacked from mast height scoring hits with their bombs and leaving one of the vessels in flames. This vessel, *Wakatsu Maru* (5,123 tons) was burnt out and sank next day.

Early next morning eight Beaufighters, loaded with two 250-lb bombs each, were ordered to find the ships and attack them again whether they were afloat or beached. To save time they went direct from Darwin airfield instead of Drysdale. Again they flew the last 100 miles to Timor skimming the surface of the sea in order to avoid detection by enemy radar. The Beaufighters were led by Wing Commander Mann[7] and the crews found *Wakatsu Maru* still burning. Mann led the attack against the other transport, which was apparently undamaged, and had two barges alongside; three other barges were between the ship and the shore in Lautem roadstead.

Mann's bombs hit the hull below the forward mast. Flight Sergeant Ferguson,[8] who followed him, strafed and bombed hitting the transport which was covered in dense smoke. Ferguson flew so low that his aircraft cut the ship's wireless aerial between the masts. Other Beaufighters followed, bombing and strafing. Meanwhile, Gordon had noticed the approach of four enemy Nick aircraft (two-engined fighters similar to the Beaufighter). Gordon promptly shot one down and damaged another. Flying Officer Garnham[9] strafed and bombed one of the barges which capsized, throwing Japanese into the water.

As a result of this foray the Beaufighters sank the cargo ship *Genmei Maru* (3,180 tons) causing heavy casualties to the enemy. The Beaufighter crews were not sure of the result and reported on return to base that the ship had been "probably destroyed", but research after the war showed they had sunk it. One of the Nicks followed the Beaufighters

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[7] W Cdr F. W. B. Mann, DFC, 142; comd 31 Sqn 1943-44. Regular air force offr; of Artarmon, NSW; b. Sydney, 13 Apr 1918.

[8] P-O D. W. Ferguson, 416943; 31 Sqn. Power house assistant; of Clare, SA; b. Melbourne, 10 Feb 1923. Killed in aircraft accident 22 Mar 1944.

[9] F-Lt J. A. Garnham, 413573; 31 Sqn. Bank clerk; of The Entrance, NSW; b. Quirindi, NSW, 5 Nov 1919.

for 80 miles when they set course for base, but the Beaufighters were faster and shook it off.

Three times in November Liberators of No. 380 Bombardment Group, operating through the R.A.A.F. base at Corunna Downs, raided Surabaya in western Java and Den Pasar in Bali. The Liberators because of their great range and bomb-carrying capacity were making the most effective contribution achieved from North-Western Area. Their geographical position in the Northern Territory enabled them to strike at targets far behind the Japanese front lines which were out of the reach of other Fifth Air Force bomber groups in New Guinea. They attacked Manokwari and Sorong in Dutch New Guinea, Halmahera, Ambon, Ternate, Kendari (the important base in Celebes) and Pomelaa, also in Celebes, where the Japanese mined nickel. These activities made a worthwhile contribution to MacArthur's advance along the north New Guinea coast by destroying enemy installations and forcing the enemy to retain defences well to the rear thereby weakening the front.

Both Bostock and Cole were anxious that the Liberators should attack Balikpapan, a very important strategic target because of the oil refineries there. Intelligence had shown that Balikpapan was in full operation as a fuel centre and the importance of the refineries to the enemy was further shown by an instruction from Japanese Headquarters dated 12th November that the building of an airfield for local protection be given first priority. Balikpapan had the only important refineries in range of Allied aircraft in the South-West Pacific. Cole ordered the group to attack it on 11th December. At about midnight, eleven Liberators dropped bombs on the target causing huge fires and explosions. Macassar was also bombed when the Liberators were on their return flight.

Cole was anxious, however, that the target should be attacked in a daylight strike in order that the best result should be obtained. Colonel Miller (commander of No. 380 Group) pointed out that such an operation was extremely hazardous because of increased enemy fighter strength at Balikpapan and the fact that the Liberators would be operating at their extreme range without fighter cover. He nevertheless agreed to lead a mission himself if Cole and Kenney would agree to accepting heavy losses. Kenney agreed, but, after further discussions between Cole and Bostock in Brisbane, it was decided not to make any further daylight strikes against well-defended back bases, including Balikpapan, until new crews were sufficiently trained. There had been an almost complete change of crews and command in No. 380 Group. Two fatal accidents had been caused by overloading of aircraft at take-off and for Balikpapan it would be necessary to load the aircraft beyond a safe limit. The risks of such a raid were too great.

By December, the character of the war in North-Western Area which was still almost entirely an air war, had undergone a great change. Japanese air strength was falling and the enemy was unable to maintain more than a few aircraft at forward bases. The Japanese were forced to discontinue

raids against Darwin. They occasionally intercepted Allied aircraft over Timor, but in the main were holding most of their fighter machines beyond the 600-mile limit.

The heavy losses suffered by the Japanese Naval Air Service around Rabaul and the Northern Solomons had forced a redistribution of the available squadrons. One 36-aircraft fighter squadron of the *23rd Air Flotilla* with 12 reserves was sent to Truk in December, and a 36-aircraft bomber squadron with 12 reserves was sent to Kwajalein in the Central Pacific to await the expected advance of the American Fleet. The weakened *7th Air Division* was withdrawn to Ambon from Wewak to assist the Japanese Navy in the protection of the Celebes area.

Air Vice-Marshal Cole was no longer thinking in terms of a "holding" strategy in North-Western Area, but was looking for a change-over to an offensive policy. Darwin was now a potential base from which an invasion of the Netherlands East Indies might be launched. Earlier Darwin had been considered too vulnerable to air attack. Now more aircraft were being moved in and supply facilities built up there. Cole moved stores, maintenance and repair facilities north to Darwin to save transport from back areas. Melville Bay was being developed as a base for Catalinas. There was even a plan to base at Darwin some of the new big American bombers, the Superfortresses (B-29's) for attacks against Balikpapan and other distant targets.

CHAPTER 8

# THE BISMARCKS BARRIER BROKEN

AFTER the lodgment of Admiral Halsey's marines at Empress Augusta Bay in Bougainville, only the final major task of the ELKTON offensive —the capture of bases on New Britain—remained to be carried out. The original aim to capture Rabaul had been abandoned in favour of its neutralisation, but General MacArthur considered it necessary to land on western New Britain and other points such as Kavieng and the Admiralties, in order to break through the Bismarcks Barrier. The elimination of enemy power in the Bismarcks was necessary for the security of the advance of the Allies into western New Guinea, and beyond to the Philippines.

At the end of 1943 the plan was:

1. Seizure of bases on western New Britain in order to control Vitiaz Strait.
2. Air offensive by Admiral Halsey's command on Rabaul from bases at Torokina.
3. Seizure of the Admiralty Islands.
4. Seizure of Kavieng, New Ireland.

The first plan made by General Krueger's Sixth Army for the New Britain operation called for a landing at Gasmata on 14th November, followed on the 20th November by two more landings, one at Cape Gloucester and the other at Tauali. However, close air support was to be given from airfields at Finschhafen, Lae and the Markham Valley; and late in October, the chief engineer reported that these airfields would not be ready in time. MacArthur therefore postponed the operation for two weeks.

MacArthur, on 23rd November, abandoned the Gasmata operation altogether because the Japanese, anticipating an attack there, had moved in reinforcements. General Kenney was in agreement since he did not need an airfield on the south coast of New Britain if he could have one at Cape Gloucester. The United States Navy also favoured Arawe, because it would provide harbours from which P.T. boats could operate in Vitiaz Strait. Moreover, it was anticipated that a regiment could take Arawe whereas a division would be needed to capture Gasmata. MacArthur set 15th December as the day for the Arawe landing and 26th December for the landing at Cape Gloucester.

The capture of Madang had been part of the task assigned to New Guinea Force, but General Blamey had expressed the view to General MacArthur that enemy bases in western New Britain should be seized beforehand to allow the undisturbed passage of transports through Vitiaz Strait. MacArthur, however, wanted a base established on the New Guinea side of Vitiaz Strait and eventually an intermediate objective, Saidor, was agreed on. The landing there, by American troops, was to take place immediately after the western New Britain landings.

Krueger expected that an attack on Cape Gloucester would be interpreted by the Japanese as a direct and immediate threat to the Rabaul bastion, and because of this there was some anxiety about the Japanese reaction. It was considered probable that enemy air forces would be unleashed against Allied forward bases particularly Finschhafen, Woodlark, Kiriwina and Goodenough in addition to the beachheads. But the effect of the Allied air offensive was likely to prevent the Japanese sending more than about 70 bombers and 100 fighters.

The Japanese knew that landings on western New Britain were imminent. To counter them, they planned to attack for three or four days from the time of the landings. The fighters would machine-gun, the light bombers would bomb in the daytime, and Bettys would make torpedo attacks at night. The Japanese had about 6,000 men round Cape Gloucester.

The task of the Allied air forces during this operation was to deny seaborne reinforcements and supply of the Cape Gloucester and Saidor areas by an intensive blockade established jointly with Allied naval forces. The plan, similar to that for earlier ELKTON operations, also called for very heavy preliminary air bombardment of the Cape Gloucester area prior to and during the period when the amphibious force was approaching. As soon as an airfield was prepared for use, one group of fighter aircraft was to be established there. Not only the Fifth Air Force and No. 9 Group, but Halsey's Thirteenth Air Force, New Zealand and American marine air units in the Solomons were to take an indirect part in the western New Britain operation. The main objective of Halsey's aircraft would be to attack Rabaul, and for this purpose the work of preparing air facilities on Bougainville was pushed ahead behind the defensive line which had been formed round Torokina.

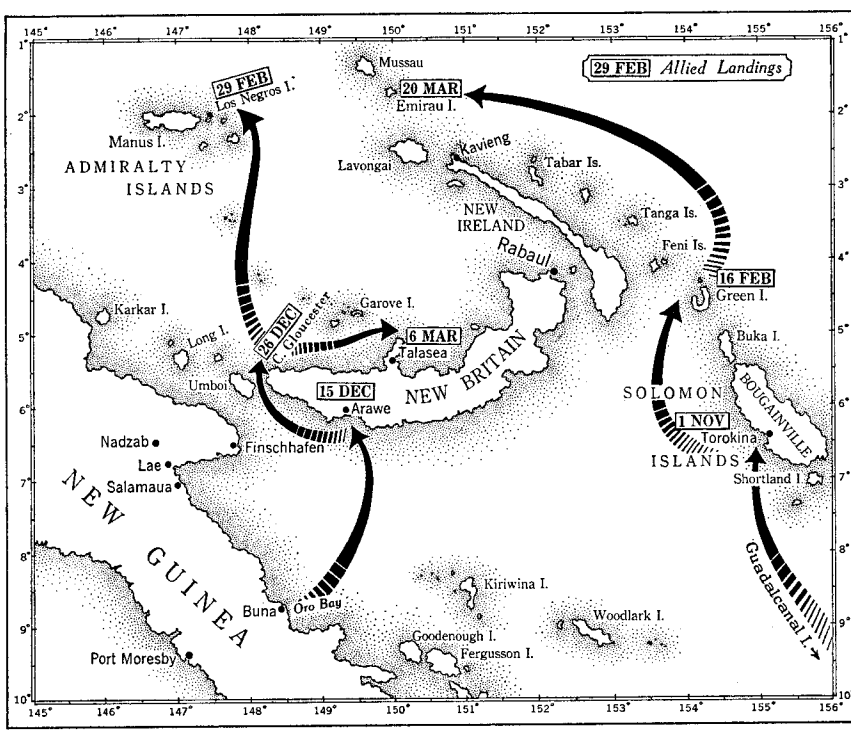
Fifth Air Force had given control of eleven American squadrons to No. 9 Group for the air operations against western New Britain, while the commander of the American First Air Task Force was to operate other American squadrons from Dobodura, and the new bases at Finschhafen, Nadzab and Lae. But these arrangements were cancelled when Arawe was substituted for Gasmata.

The air forces were set the task of making the most concentrated and sustained air bombardment yet made in the Pacific in preparation for the landing. Their work began on 20th November when 51 Liberators bombed Gasmata, followed by 70 Mitchells and 24 Liberators on 22nd November. On 23rd November four Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron made a night raid on a bridge over the Anwek River in the same area. They could plainly see the target in spite of weak moonlight and their bombs struck very close to it.

The Fifth Air Force directed four of No. 9 Group's squadrons to move during November, in preparation for the western New Britain air offensive. The two attack squadrons, Nos. 22 and 30, went forward to Kiriwina from Goodenough, and Nos. 6 and 100 Beaufort Squadrons moved from Milne Bay to Goodenough, where they occupied the sites vacated by the

attack squadrons. All four squadrons had completed their moves by 26th November. The Fifth Air Force was no longer attacking Rabaul and did not therefore need the use of Kiriwina as a staging-in base. The dispersal facilities which the construction engineers were continually expanding were sufficient to hold the concentration of six R.A.A.F. squadrons which occupied them by the beginning of December.

No. 9 Group had been reinforced in November by the arrival of No. 78 (Kittyhawk) Squadron. It was based at Kiriwina and commanded by Wing Commander Walker.[1] Late in November the pilots escorted American Liberators during their missions against Gasmata.




The attack squadrons continued their normal raids on enemy barges, few of which could now be found, and also harassed the airfields at Gasmata and Cape Hoskins. No. 22, the Boston squadron, had completed twelve months in New Guinea by the end of November. In that period the squadron carried out 133 bombing missions totalling 638 sorties, and had lost 12 aircraft with 13 aircrew killed, 10 missing and 6 wounded. In view of the fact that the squadron never had more than 12 aircraft,

[1] W Cdr G. F. Walker, DFC, 260312. Comd 78 Sqn 1943-44. Accountant; of Roseville, NSW; b. Strathfield, NSW, 6 Mar 1913.

with a maximum of 9 serviceable at any one time, the number of operations carried out was highly satisfactory. Maintenance facilities were meagre, parts scarce, and no new aircraft had been available to the squadron for the first ten months of its duty in New Guinea. Ground crews had done well to keep so many of the Bostons fit for operations for so long.

No. 9 Group's November activities were the most intense since it was formed, but with its greater strength and with the western New Britain campaign about to be launched, December promised even greater things. The month's operations began when twelve Beauforts of Nos. 6 and 100 Squadrons were sent to bomb dumps at Gasmata. Because of unpredicted winds, clouds and the darkness, only two aircraft found the assigned target. They bombed successfully while the others searched for and bombed alternative targets.

Kenney had sent his main bomber force against targets in New Guinea and western New Britain since the big raids on Rabaul in October and November. In late November and December only the Beauforts of No. 9 Group were bombing Rabaul pending the appearance there of aircraft from Halsey's command in the South Pacific. No. 9 Group planned a big raid on Rabaul by all three Beaufort squadrons for 4th December. It was to include high-level bombing attacks on the airfields and a sweep by six torpedo-carrying Beauforts led by Squadron Leader Quinn. Flying Officer Finlay,[2] who captained one of the Beauforts, described the mission:

> I was flying on the port side of Squadron Leader Quinn. We searched the Duke of York Island area and then came down the coast from Tawui Point to Praed Point. We then turned into Blanche Bay (Rabaul harbour) on a course of 270°. At 7.38 p.m. I sighted a ship of 6,000 to 7,000 tons and I turned to starboard and attacked. I dropped [the torpedo] at approximately 1,000 yards, dead abeam and turned away to port. My gunner reported an explosion approximately thirty seconds later. I looked and saw a large fire burning on the ship—smoke and flames being very clearly seen. From that point I had to concentrate on flying my aircraft and did not see the ship again.

Quinn, meanwhile, had seen the stern of a big ship and was in the act of dropping his torpedo when his aircraft ran into an obstruction which he believed to be a steel cable or a mast. He was struck in the head and wounded but dimly remembered hitting the water. He and his observer, Pilot Officer O'Loghlen,[3] were thrown into the water and although semi-conscious were able to cling weakly to the Beaufort's dinghy which had inflated itself. Japanese in small motor-boats were searching round the harbour picking up men who had jumped into the harbour presumably from a bombed ship. They had searchlights and one of these played on to Quinn's yellow dinghy. The Japanese were amazed to see two enemy airmen clinging to it. They quickly took the dinghy in tow

[2] F-Lt R. H. Finlay, DFC, 405728; 8 Sqn. Machinery salesman; of Lismore, NSW; b. Ryde, NSW, 27 Oct 1916.

[3] F-O R. B. O'Loghlen, 400662. 34 Sqn RAF, 8 Sqn. Clerk; of South Yarra, Vic; b. Melbourne, 15 Mar 1914. Drowned while prisoner of war, on or after 14 Jan 1944.

and handed the airmen over to the naval staff ashore. The other two members of Quinn's crew, Flight Sergeant Mainland[4] and Flight Sergeant McDonald[5] were either killed in the crash or drowned. Quinn and O'Loghlen were handled very roughly, then flogged. A Japanese speaking perfect English asked them what had attacked the ship. At naval headquarters Quinn heard overhead one of the Beauforts which had come to bomb Lakunai airfield; it dropped a bomb 100 yards away. Quinn was subjected to third degree for four days, and then he and two American pilots who survived crashes during raids in November were trussed up, blindfolded, and bundled into a Betty bomber which took them to Japan for further questioning. Quinn survived the war in a Japanese prisoner of war camp but O'Loghlen was drowned when a ship on which he was being transported was sunk. While Quinn was being questioned the Beauforts were bombing Lakunai airfield very successfully, although the crews were unable to see well because of searchlight interference.

On 6th December Beauforts drawn from all three squadrons extended their bombing to Borpop airfield to the north-east of Rabaul on New Ireland. The following morning Mitchells and Liberators were hammering Cape Gloucester and Borgen Bay and in the afternoon sixty-three R.A.A.F. Kittyhawks from Nos. 75, 76, 77 and 78 Squadrons attacked the Gasmata dumps, diving from 13,000 feet to 3,000 to drop their 500-lb bombs.

The air-support plan for the Arawe landing called for an attack on Gasmata airfield by No. 9 Group, three days before the assault. Thirty-four Kittyhawks, 20 from No. 76 Squadron and 14 from No. 78, were ordered to carry out the attack. The Kittyhawks, led by Wing Commander Steege,[6] commanding officer of No. 73 Wing, came over the target in sections of four aircraft dropping bombs and machine-gunning from 1,000 feet down to tree-top level in spite of anti-aircraft fire. The pilots then formed up and returned to Kiriwina.

As the day of the assault approached No. 9 Group increased its pressure on the airfields at Rabaul. The maximum number of Beauforts was sent to bomb Lakunai on 13th December, and the night before the landing thirty Beauforts were again attacking this target. An enemy aircraft followed Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron from Lakunai back to Kiriwina and bombed and strafed the airfield as the Beauforts were landing; by following in the tracks of the Beauforts it avoided being detected by the radar station. A bomb dropped by the enemy aircraft hit one of the Beauforts as it was moving to its dispersal bay. The navigator, Flying Officer Jackson,[7] was killed, and another crew member, Flying Officer

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[4] F-Sgt I. L. Mainland, 408815. 7, 6, 14 and 8 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Balldale, NSW; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 11 Jun 1915. Killed in action 4 Dec 1943.

[5] F-Sgt D. McDonald, 401714; 8 Sqn. Factory employee; of Morwell, Vic; b. Morwell, 18 Aug 1913. Killed in action 4 Dec 1943.

[6] Gp Capt G. H. Steege, DSO, DFC, 213, 11 and 3 Sqns; comd 450 Sqn 1941-42, 73 and 81 Wings 1943-44; SASO Eastern Area 1945. Comd 77 Sqn Korea 1951. Regular air force offr; of North Sydney; b. Chatswood, NSW, 31 Oct 1917.

[7] F-O W. Jackson, 408522. 32 and 100 Sqns. Accountant; of Brunswick, Vic; b. Nhill, Vic, 22 Apr 1922. Killed in action 14 Dec 1943.

Walsh,[8] seriously wounded, but the other two members of the crew escaped injury.

All through the morning from dawn on 14th December the Americans had sent squadron after squadron to bombard Arawe in preparation for the landing next day, and early on the morning of 15th December Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron were sent for a first-light attack on Borpop airfield. They raked the whole area, including the operations room and anti-aircraft positions, with cannon and machine-gun fire.

Meanwhile, men of the 112th United States Cavalry Regiment (of the 1st Cavalry Division), after preliminary bombardment by the naval force, had gone ashore. A smaller landing, comprising 150 cavalrymen, which was sent in without covering fire in the hope that surprise would be achieved, was repulsed with 50 per cent casualties. A small party landed successfully at Pilelo Island where it destroyed a party of Japanese; the R.A.A.F's No. 335 Radar Station commanded by Pilot Officer Colley[9] took part in this landing. There were 28 men in the party and they were the first Australian radar men to take part in an assault on enemy-held territory.

By accident, the landing at Arawe was discovered promptly by a Japanese patrol plane, and at 9 a.m. 33 enemy aircraft, sent by Admiral Kusaka, avoided fighter patrols of Lightnings, and bombed and strafed the landing area. Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron had been patrolling overhead since dawn, but had left the area for the base some minutes before the raiders appeared. The beach and the headquarters ship were attacked. The Japanese maintained their air attacks, sending out formations of between 20 and 30 aircraft. The R.A.A.F. radar party was heavily strafed when their equipment was being unloaded 36 hours after the landing. But, although constantly harassed by bombing and machine-gunning, their equipment was working after 48 hours. At least 150 enemy aircraft attacked Arawe on 21st December, and, in addition to inflicting casualties, succeeded in sinking a number of Allied vessels.

The pilots of No. 79 Squadron who were again on standby at Kiriwina to protect the base against enemy raids were again disappointed when the Japanese sent no raiders. The squadron had shot down a Dinah on 28th November but little had happened since then, and a rueful comment in the squadron diary for December recorded:

> The A.O.C. addressed air crew on two occasions but was unable to forecast greater operational activity against the enemy due to the reluctance of the Jap to do those things anticipated from him.

The pilots had become somewhat restive, but in December they were given the task of carrying out offensive patrols in New Britain and their spirits rose. The four Kittyhawk squadrons, on the other hand, were fully engaged. In December, No. 76 Squadron had to cut its training program because of the large number of operational sorties carried out.

[8] F-O J. E. Walsh, 406225. 1 and 100 Sqns. Railway employee; of Fremantle, WA; b. Wooroloo, WA, 4 Aug 1913.

[9] F-Lt J. G. Colley, 18606. Comd 335 Radar Stn 1943, 340 Radar Stn (Aitape) 1944. Electrical engineer; of Quambatook, Vic; b. Essendon, Vic, 8 Jun 1906.

By mid-December Admiral Halsey's forces in Bougainville, after some delay, had completed the construction of airfields at Torokina, and on 17th December South Pacific Command carried out its first major air operation over Rabaul: a fighter sweep by 80 fighters, 24 of which were Kittyhawks of the R.N.Z.A.F. based on Ondonga, New Georgia. While Halsey's airmen clashed with Japanese fighters in the daytime, No. 9 Group Beauforts continued to harass and cause damage to the enemy with night raids.

The comprehensiveness of the air support for the Cape Gloucester operation is described by the historians of the American Army Air Forces thus:

> Beginning on 19 December, the Second and Third Air Task Forces used their fighter bombers and such mediums as were available to make sure that no opposition to the Gloucester landing came from the New Guinea fields at Madang, Alexishafen, and Wewak. The RAAF Beauforts, after a short break, resumed nightly harassing attacks on Rabaul on 13 December. On 17 December, SOPAC put seventy-six fighters over Rabaul; and two days later, P-38's and RNZAF P-40's escorted six Thirteenth Air Force B-24's to Rabaul. The B-24's mounted three more attacks—on 23 December when they were accompanied by another fighter sweep and on the 24th and 25th—and a SOPAC carrier force attacked shipping in Kavieng Harbour with bombs and torpedoes on Christmas Day. The usual reconnaissance was maintained, with RAAF Catalinas nightly covering the Kavieng area. In all, the enemy was being hit by a coordinated air attack which he hardly knew how to handle.[1]

The Catalinas of Nos. 11, 20 and 43 Squadrons, which had played their part in preparation for the Lae and Bougainville landings, came into the picture again on 20th December when they joined in the bombardment of Kavieng and Gasmata in preparation for the Cape Gloucester landing. Including the dive bombers of No. 24, aircraft of no fewer than thirteen R.A.A.F. squadrons were regularly bombing New Britain and New Ireland in December. In addition to machine-gunning and cannon strafing, the R.A.A.F. dropped 205 tons of bombs from the time the campaign opened on 21st November until the landing at Cape Gloucester on 26th December. In the same period the Fifth Air Force, using heavy bombers as well as their medium bombers, dropped 3,926 tons of bombs in pre-invasion raids. As a result of this bombardment—very heavy for those days—and naval bombardment the marines walked ashore at Cape Gloucester on 26th December without opposition from the dazed and disorganised defenders.

Halsey had sent a carrier air task force to strike Kavieng on Christmas Day, but in spite of this raid and numerous forays over Rabaul by his land-based aircraft from Torokina, Japanese air reaction to the Cape Gloucester landing was heavy; on 26th and 27th December 300 enemy aircraft attacked at both Cape Gloucester and Arawe. The Japanese were aware of the threat to Cape Gloucester early in the morning and aircraft from Rabaul attacked the beachhead only an hour after the landing.

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[1] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (1950), Vol IV, p. 338.

Another attack soon afterwards was repulsed by American fighters, but in the afternoon a mixed force of dive and medium bombers escorted by fighters attacked the naval task force, sinking the destroyer *Brownson* and damaging three other destroyers. There were numerous enemy air attacks next day. However, the air offensive petered out by 28th December, and on the 30th the Cape Gloucester airfield fell to the marines. A few days later, on 2nd January, part of the 32nd American Division landed at Saidor and possession of this base and Cape Gloucester gave MacArthur complete control over Vitiaz Strait.

In January 1944 the squadrons of No. 9 Group and Australian Catalinas of North-Eastern Area continued to support the American invasion of New Britain by bombarding bases in New Britain and New Ireland, and patrolling surrounding waters in search of enemy barges. Support for the American ground forces in New Britain was No. 9 Group's responsibility, while the Fifth Air Force concentrated on New Guinea. For the Beauforts of Nos. 6, 8 and 100 Squadrons the main target was Rabaul, where the Japanese, in spite of severe losses, continued to maintain aircraft. These aircraft, however, were mainly fighters. The Japanese were, therefore, on the defensive at a time when the situation, from their point of view, called for a bomber offensive against the Allied advanced bases.

Forty-six Beauforts (fourteen from No. 6, twenty from No. 8 and twelve from No. 100) were directed to attack the dispersal areas at Lakunai on the night of 2nd-3rd January. Earlier, a Beaufort had been sent over the target to report the weather, which was considered to be satisfactory but several of the Beauforts ran into heavy cloud and rain and had to return to base without attacking. Mechanical failure and damage during take-off prevented other Beauforts from taking part. However, 35 aircraft, attacking singly in rapid succession, dropped 32 tons of bombs at Lakunai, causing fires along the airfield and in buildings at the south-eastern end. The Japanese ground defences opened fire on them and searchlights caught some in a cone of light. A Beaufort from No. 8 captained by Flying Officer Goodwin,[2] arrived over the target with another Beaufort at 9.42 p.m. and was caught in these searchlights. Goodwin's aircraft did not return to base and, since no messages were received from it after its arrival over Rabaul, it was considered that it was shot down by anti-aircraft fire. A ship off shore near the Lakunai airfield was hit by bombs during these attacks and crews could see flames coming from it. On 3rd January Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron and four Kittyhawks from No. 76 Squadron sank a lighter and then attacked a schooner which caught fire. It was settling into the water at the stern when they left the target.

The following night Air Commodore Lukis sent 32 Beauforts to bombard both Vunakanau and Rapopo airfields, but heavy cloud and rain forced many of these aircraft to turn back before reaching the targets, or

[2] F-O J. A. Goodwin, 404827; 8 Sqn. Grocer; of Cairns, Qld; b. Chillagoe, Qld, 30 Nov 1915. Killed in action 2 Jan 1944.

to attack alternative targets, and two turned back because of mechanical trouble. However, four Beauforts found and bombed Vunakanau, and nine bombed Rapopo. The weather was the worst the crews had experienced during their night raids on Rabaul. In the next few days the Beauforts continued their heavy night attacks on the Japanese air installations, the last attack being on the night of 7th-8th January when they bombed Lakunai and Tobera airfields. The Beaufort night attacks had been a potent supplement to the efforts of the American Thirteenth Air Force, American naval air forces and the Royal New Zealand Air Force, which continued to bomb Rabaul during the day.

After the establishment of airfields at Empress Augusta Bay on Bougainville, the Rabaul area was within easy range of Halsey's aircraft, and during January the task of subduing Rabaul was allotted to South Pacific forces. The major portion of the Gazelle Peninsula on which Rabaul stands was included in Halsey's South Pacific command. As a result No. 9 Group no longer attacked Rabaul but was confined to the central part of New Britain, south of Wide Bay and east of Arawe. At Cape Gloucester on the western tip of New Britain, the Fifth Air Force continued to give direct support to the 1st Marine Division, in addition to bombing Wewak, Madang, Alexishafen, and other enemy bases on the New Guinea coast.

Lukis was disappointed with the role now allotted to No. 9 Group. He pointed out to General Whitehead, commander of the Fifth Air Force, that there was not likely to be any contact with enemy aircraft in central New Britain. The fighter pilots, he said, were again becoming restive at the continued lack of opportunity. Kiriwina, which they were assigned to defend, was not being raided, nor was it likely to be raided because the Japanese were on the defensive and rapidly declining in strength at Rabaul. Quips about "the Non-Ops Group" were going the rounds in the air force.

On 17th January Lukis sent 32 Beauforts to bomb an enemy camp and dump area on the Amgen River near Lindenhafen. With adequate fighter escort available the Beauforts could attack in daylight. The escort included sixteen Kittyhawks from No. 77 Squadron, seventeen from No. 76 and eight Spitfires from No. 79 Squadron. This force of 73 aircraft was the strongest R.A.A.F. force to be sent against a single target up to that time. Over the target the Australians met no anti-aircraft fire and their bombs caused many fires and explosions. The only loss was a Beaufort of No. 6 piloted by Flying Officer Wade.[3] This Beaufort developed engine trouble and Wade turned for base. He jettisoned his bomb load but the bomber continued to lose altitude and he was forced to land it in the sea. The rubber dinghy failed to release from the aircraft and the crew were left floundering in the sea. However, Flight Sergeant Nash,[4] the wireless operator, had been able to send out messages giving the

[3] F-O H. M. Wade, 415201. 14 and 6 Sqns. Salesman; of Claremont, WA; b. Perth, WA, 9 Jan 1917. Killed in action 28 Mar 1944.

[4] P-O J. A. Nash, DFM, 410368. 14 and 6 Sqns. Cutter; of Auburn, Vic; b. Carlton, Vic, 10 Jan 1923. Killed in action 28 Mar 1944.

position of the Beaufort and after a few hours in the water the crew was rescued by an American Catalina.

Four days later the mission against Lindenhafen was repeated by a still larger force, 33 Beauforts, 35 Kittyhawks and 8 Spitfires taking part. They struck the target again the following day. Two Kittyhawks were lost, but both pilots were rescued unhurt from the sea. These operations were continued through January and February, the only opposition being from anti-aircraft fire from ground positions. A number of Bostons of No. 22 Squadron were hit by enemy fire when they raided Lindenhafen on 30th January. One Boston, piloted by Wing Commander Emerton, the commanding officer of No. 22, with Pilot Officer Gawne[5] as observer, caught fire when hit and crashed into the ground near the Kabu River.

The marines were now pursuing the routed Japanese forces round Cape Gloucester. As the Japanese retreated eastward the American troops made a series of jumps by small craft along the northern and southern coasts of New Britain, visiting barge hideouts and seizing supplies. Cut off from their supplies, the routed enemy soldiers left behind sick, dead and dying in their path. Some of these wretched Japanese, too weak to go farther and abandoned by their fellows, waited until American patrols came into view and then killed themselves with hand grenades. Whole battalions of the enemy melted away, men dying from malaria, beri-beri, starvation and wounds, or drowning while trying to cross swollen rivers. Only a fraction of the troops in western New Britain met death in battle. The action of No. 9 Group in attacking escape routes, barge traffic, airfields, villages and strong-points, assisted in the destruction of the remnants of the enemy forces and in preventing their escape, or the movement of aid or reinforcements from Rabaul.

Meanwhile, the net was closing more tightly on Rabaul from the east. Admiral Halsey was making ready to land a force at Green Island only 120 miles due east of Rabaul. To cover this operation, Rabaul was to be neutralised by Halsey's air forces, while Kenney's squadrons concentrated on Wewak and Kavieng. Kenney struck first at Wewak in early February and then at Kavieng.

Australian Catalinas again played a part in the operation by carrying out night harassing raids on Kavieng. From early February single Catalinas from Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons were engaged in this task. On the night of 7th February one of the Catalinas on this mission radioed an S.O.S. message stating that the aircraft was on fire. The Catalina, captained by Squadron Leader Todd,[6] did not return to its base, and, although wide searches were made for it by aircraft of No. 9 Group, its whereabouts and the fate of its crew were not discovered until some time later. It was then learned that, after bombing

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[5] P-O T. J. Gawne, 408648. 90 Sqn USAAF, 33 and 22 Sqns. Ecclesiastical student; of Surrey Hills, Vic; b. Ararat, Vic, 26 Oct 1920. Killed in action 30 Jan 1944.

[6] Sqn Ldr J. E. Todd, 271707. 20 and 11 Sqns. Commercial pilot; of West Ryde, NSW; b. Sydney, 3 Feb 1914. Died while POW 22 Jul 1944.

Kavieng, the Catalina was returning to base when a reconnaissance flare exploded inside it setting it on fire. The crew failed to get the flames under control and the captain made a forced landing at Jacquinot Bay. All the crew were able to leave the aircraft and reached the shore near Malakua. When challenged by Japanese, four of them escaped into the bush and eventually reached safety. The remaining six were taken prisoner and one of them, Flight Lieutenant Stacy,[7] survived the war. Todd died of illness while a prisoner, and the Japanese said that the four remaining members of the crew were killed in an Allied bombing attack while imprisoned at Talili.

The night after Todd's machine was lost a Catalina of No. 20, captained by Wing Commander Havyatt,[8] went from Cairns on a similar mission to Kavieng. The Catalina dropped bombs and incendiaries in the target area but, while over Kavieng, searchlights caught it in a cone of light and Bofors shells began to strike it causing considerable damage and wounding one of the crew. The effectiveness of the enemy defences, in spite of the cloud which prevailed at the time, indicated that the Japanese were using radar instruments.

On 15th February the landing at Green Island was made by part of the 3rd New Zealand Division. The New Zealanders quickly crushed the small enemy garrison and the construction of an airfield began immediately. Though Allied squadrons based on Green Island would be dangerously close to Rabaul, the enemy attempted only two raids on the invaders with a total of twenty-one dive bombers which attacked Allied shipping off Green Island some hours after the landing. Further evidence of enemy air weakness at Rabaul was indicated by his failure to intercept the air and surface bombardments of Kavieng and Rabaul which took place on 15th February. Most of the Allied planes which now attacked Rabaul were unmolested by enemy aircraft.

The third phase of the invasion of New Britain was a landing by elements of the 1st Marine Division on Willaumez Peninsula, 110 miles east of Cape Gloucester. This operation was an integral part of the New Britain campaign and had been laid down in a General Headquarters warning instruction of 6th May 1943. The task was to "neutralise or capture Talasea", a mission settlement on the peninsula. There was an airfield at Talasea and it was a strongly-held post which dominated the main escape routes of the Japanese garrisons retreating from the western end of the island.

In mid-February, squadrons of No. 9 Group began preliminary bombardments of Talasea in preparation for this landing. On 15th February, twenty-six Beauforts, escorted by Kittyhawks and Spitfires, demolished buildings there. The bombardment and strafing was repeated next day by a larger force. Frequent attacks were also made on the enemy airfield at

[7] F-Lt B. P. Stacy, 406446. 9 and 11 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Claremont, WA; b. Perth, WA, 24 Feb 1910.

[8] W Cdr H. G. Havyatt, 391. 10 Sqn; comd 107 Sqn 1943, 20 Sqn 1943-44. Regular air force offr; of Edgecliff, NSW; b. Hawera, NZ, 19 Jul 1919. Killed in action 21 May 1944.

Cape Hoskins which had to be kept unserviceable to prevent the staging in of enemy fighters from Rabaul. The landing at Talasea was made by a small force of marines on 6th March. They encountered scattered mortar and machine-gun fire but the enemy quickly retreated, and on 10th March the airfield was in American hands. That day two Bostons and four Beaufighters from No. 9 Group discovered two 16-foot wooden boats each containing about sixteen Japanese. Seven strafing runs were made by the Australian aircraft and one boat was sunk, many of the occupants being killed.

Through February and early March, the R.A.A.F. struck repeatedly at Japanese positions and bivouac areas at Jacquinot Bay, Pondo Point on the eastern shores of Open Bay, and targets at Kamalgaman, Kalai, Gavuvu and Ulamona.

In February, the Japanese command made two significant withdrawals. They withdrew their fleet from Truk, and their remaining aircraft from Rabaul.[9] It was not that Rabaul itself was any longer of great importance to the Japanese. What was important strategically was that the Japanese had dribbled into this base over a period of some months hundreds of aircraft, especially carrier aircraft, which, with their crews, were lost in air battles and on the ground. The enemy was unable to commit carrier air groups in the defence of the Marshall Islands because they could not replace those they had lost at Rabaul with equally well-trained pilots. Finally, because they found it almost impossible to keep supplying Rabaul and because of the heavy raid on Truk by Admiral Spruance's carrier task groups on 17th February, they withdrew all remaining aircraft to Truk as reinforcements. The last vigorous interception in the air over Rabaul was on the 19th February. Next day all fighter aircraft left for Truk leaving only 30 damaged Zekes and 26 bombers. Rabaul had no air cover but nevertheless the commanders were ordered to stand firm. Kusaka and his staff officers met on the 20th February in an atmosphere of gloom but the conference ended with "Shikata ga nai—let's get to work".[1]

The offensive power of Rabaul had been destroyed without the need of an invasion and a costly land campaign. General Arnold estimated that the enemy lost nearly 900 aircraft in defending the base.[2] The effort of the R.A.A.F's three Beaufort squadrons, though relatively small compared with that of the American squadrons engaged, had contributed materially to this victory. The attack and fighter squadrons of No. 9 Group had also played their part indirectly.

In the weeks preceding the Japanese withdrawal of their aircraft, Rabaul was subjected to sustained bombardment. Frequently three powerful raiding forces would attack in one day. The terror of the air assault on Rabaul

[9] At Rabaul, however, they rebuilt eleven aircraft from unserviceable machines, and with these made harassing raids on Manus, and elsewhere, and made communication flights to Truk, Bougainville and New Ireland.

[1] S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol VI (1950), p. 408.

[2] General H. H. Arnold, *Second Report to Secretary for War.*

in this period and earlier is vividly described in the diary of the Reverend Father R. P. Poncelet, a Belgian-born Marist priest from Bougainville, who was interned at Vunapope in the Rabaul area and experienced the raids at the receiving end. Father Poncelet wrote:

> In November, December and January the daily attacks continued. Clouds of American aircraft, bombers and fighters, arrived each morning. The sirens announced them with their strident whistling noise. . . . From time to time we witnessed aerial battles when the Japanese fighters dared to sally out to the attack. We could see aircraft falling in flames, either diving off to the right or turning away slowly to disappear finally into the sea or the bush. . . . One day I saw five aircraft swallowed up into the sea near Vunapope in several minutes.[3]

Until 11th February 1944 the mission where Father Poncelet was interned had not been attacked. But on that day he wrote:

> The American aircraft, instead of coming from the direction of the sea, came by the interior of the island from the south-east. Suddenly two, then several, broke away from the group, dived, grew bigger and in an instant seemed quite close, as if they were swooping down onto us. "They're coming onto us!" someone shouted. Immediately everyone left the entrance [to the shelter] and jumped inside. We were hardly under the ground when a hail crashed down on the iron sheets of the roofs: it was aircraft which were shooting up the mission and the camp from a very low altitude. At the same time, several bombs fell and burst above us, causing formidable explosions and bringing about falls of earth into the trench. . . . Brother Lamkamp, not having had time to take cover, had received a machine-gun bullet in the stomach. He died of it. . . . What disaster there was everywhere: bombs had fallen around the house of the Sisters of Our Lady breaking things, making holes, flinging everything far and wide . . . bodies of Japanese were lying about, torn and covered with dust. A Sister was already gathering up human remains in a bucket: a neck, a hand, a whole head.

Father Poncelet described how the Japanese took refuge in the interior of the island, leaving behind them heaps of munitions and mountains of supplies which burned slowly for days and weeks. He said:

> We waited the disembarkation of the Americans: they were being announced on all sides. But it was false news. "What a pity," we often thought during the night, "that they have missed their opportunity: they would have gone into Rabaul without difficulty!" Only the American aircraft continued their visits. . . . Little by little the Japanese regained their courage and came back towards the sea and by night evacuated on motor lorries all the supplies and munitions left to them on the shores and went and hid them inland, where they were becoming stronger.

The Japanese Combined Fleet had waited many months at Truk for a favourable moment to engage the American Fleet, and the order to withdraw given by Admiral Koga in February marked a new phase in the Pacific war. Koga ordered part of the fleet to Palau and the remainder to Singapore. The force which arrived at Singapore during February included the *III Air Fleet* under Admiral Ozawa, and the battleships *Yamato* and *Nagato*.

The absence from Truk of the Japanese Fleet and the appearance of part of it at Singapore was reported promptly to General MacArthur.

[3] Patrick O'Reilly et Jean-Marie Sédès, *Jaunes, Noirs et Blancs, Trois Années de Guerre Aux Iles Salomon* (1949), pp. 244 et seq.

The news enabled him to proceed more freely with his coming advance into the Admiralty Islands, but also caused fears to be expressed that the Japanese Navy intended to sortie into the Indian Ocean and either attack naval units in Indian waters, or bombard Fremantle in Western Australia. General Headquarters reasoned that a foray against Fremantle, if attempted, would be intended by the Japanese to divert MacArthur's forces and the American Navy from their threatened offensives in the Pacific. Neither MacArthur nor the American Pacific Fleet were diverted. MacArthur continued with his offensive, but made plans immediately to strengthen Western Australian defences by moving air reinforcements.

Land-based aircraft would be able to give reasonable security to the west coast and they could use the airfields already available. On 28th February General Headquarters directed Kenney to be ready to:

1. Concentrate a striking force of sixty heavy bombers in Western Australia on twenty-four hours' notice.
2. Reinforce this heavy bomber striking force with medium bombers when directed by this headquarters (G.H.Q.).
3. Provide three fighter squadrons for the defence of Perth.
4. Operate heavy and medium bombers from Darwin, Corunna Downs, Geraldton and Carnarvon.
5. Supply the air forces operating in Western Australia by air in an emergency.

The Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, on 4th March cabled Mr Churchill asking for an opinion on the Japanese naval moves:

> In view of recent attacks on Truk and the movement of part of the Japanese fleet from that base, could you inform me of the opinion of your naval advisers about the probability of Japanese incursions into the Indian Ocean and whether they are likely to attempt a diversion to relieve the pressure in the Pacific. If so, are they capable of, or likely to attempt, anything more than raids, what are the probable objectives and what is our capacity to defeat such attacks?

The answers to Curtin's questions were contained in a cablegram which Churchill had sent the previous day and which had crossed Curtin's. Churchill in this message said:

> We have studied this new development which has interesting features. The Japanese must have appreciated that Truk, where normally they stationed half their fleet, was becoming too exposed, and evidently withdrew before the recent American attack. The choices with which they were then faced were either to concentrate their whole fleet in Japanese waters, or to move a part to Singapore, using the Pelews [Palaus] as an advanced base. . . . The absence of the Japanese battle fleet from the Pacific gives the Americans a very clear field. . . . Possibly the Japanese intend to raid our communications between Calcutta and Ceylon, or elsewhere in the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless, it is not thought that serious danger, either to India or to Western Australia, is likely to develop. Our battleship squadron in Ceylon is well posted. Our shore-based aircraft there are strong. Japan has only four fleet carriers and eight battleships fit for operations. She is threatened from the Pacific and the Bay of Bengal and must keep her fleet intact for the later stages of the war. We, therefore, consider it unlikely that the new move indicates offensive intentions by Japan. This of course does not preclude the possibility of occasional offensive sorties.

The British assessment of the situation was reassuring and there appeared to be no cause for alarm until, on the afternoon of 7th March, an American submarine which was cruising north of Lombok Strait received a radar contact from two heavy vessels. The submarine did not actually sight these vessels, but from Intelligence sources it was known that two battleships escorted by destroyers had left Singapore on 4th March sailing in the direction of Surabaya. The Australian Chiefs of Staff Committee reported to the Government on 8th March that there was a possibility that this force had entered the Indian Ocean, and in view of the possibility that Fremantle might be the objective, action was taken as follows:

(*a*) all local defences were manned;
(*b*) five submarines in Fremantle were ordered to form a patrol to seaward;
(*c*) all necessary steps to clear the harbour by p.m. on Thursday were being taken;
(*d*) General Headquarters had taken steps to send air reinforcements to the west coast forthwith.

A conference was called at Allied Air Headquarters in Brisbane, and General Kenney then ordered No. 380 Bombardment Group to return from New Guinea to its base at Fenton in the Northern Territory. If the threat to Fremantle developed this group would move to Cunderdin or Geraldton. He also ordered Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to take charge of the air defence of Western Australia and send a number of his squadrons there. Accordingly, on 8th March, Bostock signalled all Australian air force areas concerned ordering them to carry out emergency dispositions as follow:

No. 43 Squadron to move to Darwin.
Nos. 452 and 457 Squadrons to Perth as fighter defence squadrons.
No. 18 Squadron to Potshot (Exmouth Gulf).
No. 31 Squadron to Potshot (Exmouth Gulf).
No. 84 Squadron from Horn Island to Strauss to take the place of the Spitfires in the defence of North-Western Area.
No. 120 Squadron to Potshot from Canberra.

Each squadron was to move in two parts, the first part to consist of the aircraft with their crews, and the second of maintenance men and equipment sufficient for fourteen days. Routine operations which interfered with the preparations were to be cancelled. Extra fuel supplies and 500-lb bombs were sent to the west by sea, and a large number of American Dakota air transports were allotted to carry light equipment and maintenance crews.

Air Commodore Brownell,[4] the Air Officer Commanding, Western Area, had been organising air defences around Perth and Exmouth Gulf since the first hint of a possible Japanese naval attack. The Australian army placed transports and equipment at his disposal, and he rushed bombs and supplies to Cunderdin for the use of heavy bombers. Brownell

[4] Air Cmdre R. J. Brownell, CBE, MC, MM. (1st AIF: 9 Bty, 3 Fld Arty Bde, and RAF.) OC RAAF Cd, WA 1939; comd RAAF units Far East 1940-41; AOC 1 Trng Gp 1941-42; AOC Western Area 1943-45. Regular air force offr; of Perth, WA; b. Hobart, 17 May 1894.

told Bostock that he considered it wrong to base three squadrons at Potshot, which the enemy was unlikely to attack, and moreover the squadrons would be much too far away to aid effectively in the defence of Perth. However, Darwin might be the enemy target and the squadrons at Potshot could return more rapidly to Darwin if they remained there.

News of the emergency in Western Australia leaked out to the public and rumours spread of a coming Japanese invasion or air raid. The rumours were strengthened by the sudden disappearance of all Allied shipping from Fremantle harbour. Army garrisons were strengthened. The local Volunteer Defence Corps was called to duty and manned anti-aircraft batteries.




R.A.A.F. Command's instructions signalled to North-Western Area caused a stir in that area also. Wing Commander Jeffrey, commander of No. 1 Fighter Wing, told squadron commanders that a "Japanese naval task force was loose in the Indian Ocean headed in the general direction of the Perth area". On the afternoon of 8th March he passed on the order to Nos. 452 and 457 to fly to Pearce and have the first echelon ready to begin operations against the enemy on Friday, 10th March.

The men of these squadrons as well as those of Nos. 18, 31, 120 (at Canberra) and 84 (at Horn Island) were imbued with a sense of urgency, and worked feverishly all night. By dawn next day the aircraft were ready to go. No. 457 took off at 8 a.m. and No. 452 at 8.30 a.m. for Derby despite a bad weather report. The clouds were so low and dense that the Spitfires were in danger of running into one of the many cliffs

that abound in the area. Some of the pilots could not safely proceed to Derby and landed instead at Wyndham. Twenty-four machines of No. 84 from Horn Island had to turn back when they ran into heavy cloud, and one of them disappeared into the sea. The coastal bases through which the squadrons were being sent did not have sufficient men or adequate refuelling equipment for the sudden demands made on them, and this enforced long delays.

The Dutch pilots of No. 120 flew their Kittyhawks across the Nullarbor plains through Ceduna, Forrest and Kalgoorlie. At Kalgoorlie, Dakota and Kittyhawk aircraft were landing every ten minutes and ground crews were engaged continuously on inspections and refuelling.

At Potshot the weather was the worst possible. On 10th March severe cyclonic storms struck the area and converted the airfield into a swamp. The camp was flooded out, and stores and equipment dispersed in depressions were covered with four feet of water. Aircraft wheels sank in the muddy ground.

Meanwhile, the Spitfires were coming down the west coast. Alternate dust and drenching tropical rains accompanied by high winds made flying difficult, while mosquitoes, blinding heat and flies made living conditions on the ground uncomfortable. One Spitfire crashed at Carnarvon while another had a forced landing at Gingin. A final hazard for the weary pilots was a dense pall of smoke around Perth caused by bushfires.

Five hours after landing at Guildford on 12th March sixteen Spitfires of No. 452 with their "scarlet-eyed, bearded, sunburned and unkempt pilots" were ready to meet enemy raiders in the air. No. 457 also had fourteen aircraft ready and the two Spitfire squadrons together with No. 85 Squadron (armed with Boomerangs) assumed the defence of the Perth-Fremantle area. All three squadrons were concentrated at Guildford, instead of Pearce as originally intended. No. 25 Squadron, flying Vengeances, was to make dive-bombing attacks if the enemy force came within 200 miles of the coast.

Brownell had ordered maximum seaward patrols by his reconnaissance planes (Beauforts, and Catalinas of the American Navy's No. 10 Patrol Wing) but no sign of the enemy naval force was found. Similar night searches were made by the Catalinas of No. 43 from Darwin, again without result.

On 10th March the radar station at Geraldton reported the approach of an unidentified aircraft. There were three indications of this aircraft and on the advice of Brownell, Lieut-General Gordon Bennett, commanding III Corps, ordered the sounding of the air raid sirens in Perth-Fremantle. The fighter squadrons were warned, hospitals evacuated and air raid wardens sent to their posts. However, no raid developed and the "all clear" was sounded.

The whole emergency operation turned out to be abortive. The Japanese had no plan to attack in Western Australia or elsewhere in the Indian Ocean. The Japanese Fleet had left Truk because it was afraid it would risk destruction from American carrier aircraft if it remained as it had

virtually no air support there.[5] Admiral Koga left Truk for Japan on 10th February in *Musashi*. The move of the fleet from Truk proved to be a fortunate one for the Japanese Navy because the carrier attack they feared was in fact launched against Truk on 17th and 18th February, a few days after it moved out. The *Third Fleet* went to Singapore to train its carrier pilots, and on 2nd April it left Singapore for Mindanao.

For the R.A.A.F. and American air transport command the operation provided experience in the rapid movement of squadrons. The Spitfires failed to reach Perth in the time required but they were handicapped by the worst possible weather and the lack of refuelling and servicing equipment on the way. On 20th March Kenney signalled Bostock informing him that the danger had passed and ordering the return of all squadrons to their proper stations at the discretion of R.A.A.F. Command.

[5] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, p. 518: Vice-Adm Shigeru Fukudome.

CHAPTER 9

# ANTI-SUBMARINE OPERATIONS IN 1943

WHILE the Australian squadrons of No. 9 Group and North-Western Area fought the enemy over the islands to the north, other Australian squadrons and an American naval patrol wing, which flew Catalina flying-boats from Crawley (near Perth) in Western Australia, were engaged in the task of protecting maritime trade on the Australian coast and the shipping supply line to New Guinea. This responsibility, shared with the Royal Australian Navy, had been given by General Kenney to R.A.A.F. Command. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock directed operations from his headquarters in Brisbane.[1]

Australia was dependent on merchant vessels for vital overseas supplies and munitions. Aircraft patrols had therefore to be flown daily to give protection from Japanese submarines which cruised off the eastern seaboard, ready to strike at vessels moving in and out of Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne or moving through the Coral Sea and Torres Strait to the forward battle areas. In 1942 a number of ships had been sunk by Japanese submarines, and others had been shelled and damaged. These attacks had caused loss of life and disruption to trade, but the effect of the enemy submarine campaign was by no means as serious as the effect of the Allied submarine campaign on Japanese merchant shipping. To the end of April 1943 Allied submarines had sunk 226 Japanese vessels of 500 tons and above. Of these, American submarines had sunk 217, Dutch six and British three.[2]

The enemy sent submarines to the Australian coast again early in 1943. Two Australian ships and one American were torpedoed and sunk in January and February; other vessels were damaged by torpedoes but managed to reach harbour. This renewed threat to shipping and the need at the same time to continue meeting the heavy operational needs of the New Guinea theatre placed a strain on Australian air and naval resources. So great was the need for aircraft to fly on anti-submarine patrols that Bostock was forced to press three reserve squadrons into service, using instructors and partly-trained aircrews from the operational training units.[3] The reserve squadrons were equipped with Ansons which, though reliable, had a very limited range and carried a small bomb load.

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[1] In March 1943 General MacArthur had set up the South-West Pacific Sea Frontier Force, charged with the responsibility (under the Commander, Allied Naval Forces) of giving naval protection to sea communications in the South-West Pacific. This organisation was commanded by Admiral Sir Guy Royle, Chief of the Australian Naval Staff. Royle's command and RAAF Command were jointly responsible for the protection of shipping. Air Vice-Marshal Jones, Chief of the Air Staff, had proposed to MacArthur in March that a similar organisation for the RAAF should be set up whereby he would take over responsibility for air force operations in defence of Australian territory when the main RAAF combat force moved forward towards Japan. MacArthur rejected the proposal without offering any reasons.

[2] Report by American Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, 1946.

[3] The operational training units engaged were Nos. 1 (East Sale) and 3 (Rathmines). Although Nos. 11 and 20 (Catalina) Squadrons based at Cairns were engaged in offensive bombing and mining operations mainly north of Darwin, their primary mission was also the protection of sea communications from submarines.

In addition to coping with the submarine threat Bostock had to be ready to meet possible air attacks launched from Japanese carriers as well as the landings which were still considered possible.

For purposes of air defence Australia was divided into five areas: Eastern, Western, Southern, North-Eastern and North-Western. In April 1943, the commanders of these areas (excluding the North-Western which has been dealt with in earlier chapters) had the squadrons shown in the accompanying table at their disposal:

North-Eastern Area (Air Commodore A. H. Cobby)

- No. 7, general-reconnaissance bomber, equipped with Beauforts, based at Ross River, Qld.
- No. 9, fleet cooperation, equipped with Seagulls, based at Bowen, Qld.
- No. 11, general-reconnaissance bomber, equipped with Catalinas, based at Cairns, Qld.
- No. 20, general-reconnaissance bomber, equipped with Catalinas, based at Cairns, Qld.

Eastern Area (Air Vice-Marshal W. H. Anderson)

- No. 5, army cooperation, equipped with Wirraways, based at Kingaroy, Qld.
- No. 23, dive bomber, equipped with Wirraways, based at Lowood, Qld.
- No. 24, dive bomber, equipped with Wirraways, based at Bankstown, NSW.
- No. 32, general-reconnaissance bomber, equipped with Hudsons, based at Camden, NSW.
- No. 71, reconnaissance and submarine patrol, equipped with Ansons, based at Lowood, Qld.
- No. 73, reconnaissance and submarine patrol, equipped with Ansons, based at Nowra, NSW.
- No. 83, fighter, equipped with Wirraways, based at Strathpine, Qld.

Southern Area (Group Captain C. W. Pearce)

- No. 67, reconnaissance and submarine patrol, equipped with Ansons, based at Laverton, Vic.
- No. 86, fighter, equipped with Kittyhawks, based at Gawler, S.A.

Western Area[4] (Air Commodore R. J. Brownell)

- No. 14, general-reconnaissance bomber, equipped with Beauforts, based at Pearce, WA.
- No. 25, dive bomber, equipped with Wirraways, based at Pearce, WA.
- No. 76, fighter, equipped with Kittyhawks, based at Exmouth Gulf, WA.
- No. 85, fighter, equipped with Boomerangs, based at Pearce, WA.

Thus more Australian operational squadrons were on duty in the south than in the front-line areas. The need for patrols to check submarine attacks on shipping and to guard against possible carrier-borne forays on the capital cities, prevented the Australian air force from maintaining a larger number of squadrons in New Guinea. The Fifth Air Force, on the other hand, freed of this responsibility and equipped with better aircraft, was able to maintain its whole force in the forward areas.

[4] Western Area also had American Catalinas of Patrol Wing 10, United States Navy, available for anti-submarine and reconnaissance duty.

On 11th April 1943, an Anson aircraft from No. 67 Squadron, Laverton, piloted by Pilot Officer Sinclair[5] with Sergeants Carey[6] and Eatough[7] as crew, was patrolling ahead of a convoy of vessels which were on their way from Melbourne to Sydney. At 2 p.m. Sinclair turned about a mile in front of the convoy and counted thirteen vessels. About ninety seconds later he turned again and saw only twelve, with a disturbed patch of water and a large cloud of brown smoke on the starboard line of the convoy. Sinclair flew back over the disturbance at about 1,000 feet and saw floating timber and petrol drums. Some minutes later he saw the sloop *Moresby,* one of the naval escorts, dropping depth-charges, and he therefore circled the area, but without finding anything. On reaching the rear of the convoy *Moresby* signalled to him to "come over the wreck with me". Sinclair flew at fifty feet over the wreckage and after having seen six or seven men on a raft and one clinging to some wreckage he signalled "men in water" by Aldis lamp to the *Moresby*. The escort vessels picked up these survivors. The Anson crew failed to see anything except a large patch of oil on the water and a mast extending four feet out of the sea. The torpedoed vessel was the Yugoslav motor vessel *Rečina* (4,732 tons). Nine men were rescued but 32 were lost.

The captain of the Anson did not signal information back to the operations room at Southern Area about the sinking with the result that the staff there were not aware of it until one hour and 35 minutes later. The Anson captain was under strict instructions not to report the presence of an enemy submarine until he had actually seen one. The training methods then in use were too binding with the result that "captains have been scared to use their own initiative in respect of taking action and making reports by wireless".[8]

The naval authorities on 25th April informed Eastern Area Headquarters that a submarine had torpedoed and sunk the Australian cargo ship *Kowarra* (2,125 tons) with a loss of twenty-four lives. The attack took place 160 miles north of Brisbane on 24th April. The torpedo had broken the vessel's back, the boilers had exploded, and she sank in 45 seconds. Two large submarines surfaced nearby about half an hour after the sinking.

Some thirty hours later a third vessel was torpedoed 270 miles away north-east of Evans Head. This was the *Limerick* (8,724 tons), a British ship, which was in a convoy escorted by destroyers. Two men were killed and the surviving members of the crew rescued by H.M.A.S. *Colac*. Four Anson aircraft from Bundaberg and three from Lowood searched the area for the survivors but without result. Area commanders increased the

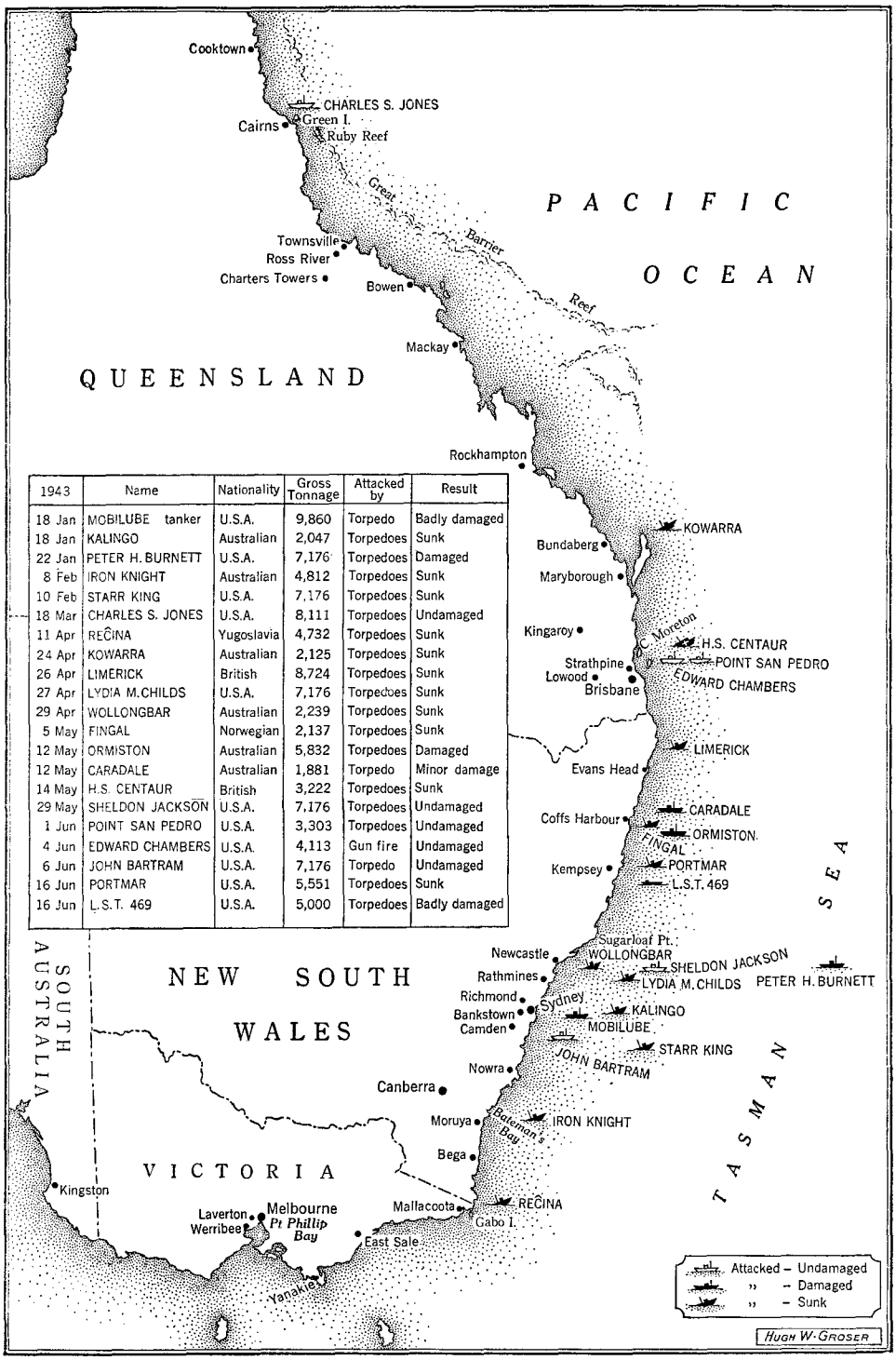
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[5] F-Lt D. R. Sinclair, 407809. 435 Sqn USAAF; 67, 23 and 21 Sqns. Grazier; of "Poolamacca" Stn, NSW; b. Crystal Brook, SA, 26 Oct 1917.

[6] W-O T. K. Carey, 8140. 4, 11, 67 and 9 Sqns, 5 Commn Unit. Clerk; of Wool Bay, SA; b. Cummins, SA, 3 Apr 1915.

[7] W-O C. L. Eatough, 12282. 71 Sqn; 13 (B) Sqn USAAF; 67 and 15 Sqns. Copy holder; of Valley, Qld; b. Brisbane, 17 Dec 1920.

[8] Letter, Gp Capt C. W. Pearce, T/AOC, Southern Area, to RAAF Command and Air Board, 23 April 1943.




| 1943 | Name | Nationality | Gross Tonnage | Attacked by | Result |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 18 Jan | MOBILUBE tanker | U.S.A. | 9,860 | Torpedo | Badly damaged |
| 18 Jan | KALINGO | Australian | 2,047 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 22 Jan | PETER H. BURNETT | U.S.A. | 7,176 | Torpedoes | Damaged |
| 8 Feb | IRON KNIGHT | Australian | 4,812 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 10 Feb | STARR KING | U.S.A. | 7,176 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 18 Mar | CHARLES S. JONES | U.S.A. | 8,111 | Torpedoes | Undamaged |
| 11 Apr | RECINA | Yugoslavia | 4,732 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 24 Apr | KOWARRA | Australian | 2,125 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 26 Apr | LIMERICK | British | 8,724 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 27 Apr | LYDIA M.CHILDS | U.S.A. | 7,176 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 29 Apr | WOLLONGBAR | Australian | 2,239 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 5 May | FINGAL | Norwegian | 2,137 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 12 May | ORMISTON | Australian | 5,832 | Torpedoes | Damaged |
| 12 May | CARADALE | Australian | 1,881 | Torpedo | Minor damage |
| 14 May | H.S. CENTAUR | British | 3,222 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 29 May | SHELDON JACKSON | U.S.A. | 7,176 | Torpedoes | Undamaged |
| 1 Jun | POINT SAN PEDRO | U.S.A. | 3,303 | Torpedoes | Undamaged |
| 4 Jun | EDWARD CHAMBERS | U.S.A. | 4,113 | Gun fire | Undamaged |
| 6 Jun | JOHN BARTRAM | U.S.A. | 7,176 | Torpedo | Undamaged |
| 16 Jun | PORTMAR | U.S.A. | 5,551 | Torpedoes | Sunk |
| 16 Jun | L.S.T. 469 | U.S.A. | 5,000 | Torpedoes | Badly damaged |

**Japanese submarine operations, 1943.**

number of patrols flown by aircraft in search of submarines but no signs of enemy activity were seen, except the debris from the sunken ships.

On 27th April at 6.55 p.m. an American ship, the *Lydia M. Childs* (7,176 tons), was torpedoed off the coast of New South Wales, about 90 miles east of Newcastle, while on passage from the United States with a cargo destined for the Middle East. The ship sank in eight minutes, all the crew having taken to the boats. An hour later a Catalina on patrol from Rathmines saw and shadowed an object which it believed to be a submarine. Soon afterwards the crew sent a signal to Eastern Area headquarters stating that they had seen a submarine. The Catalina made three bombing runs over the submarine but the bombs failed to release (it was discovered later that this was due to the master switch not being properly home) and the submarine submerged. Searches for the torpedoed vessel and survivors were carried out by aircraft and naval vessels next day. Ansons, Hudsons and Beauforts operating from Camden saw wreckage and two life-boats containing nineteen men who were picked up by a corvette which the aircraft diverted to them.

Bostock's staff considered that at least three and possibly four enemy submarines were now operating off the eastern coast. The Japanese campaign against shipping had accounted for four merchant ships in the space of three weeks in spite of constant patrols by aircraft and naval escort.

All possible reconnaissance aircraft were pressed into service along the coast. On 27th April, six Hudson aircraft from No. 1 Operational Training Unit left East Sale for Camden where they came under the control of No. 32 Squadron. On arrival they were bombed up, refuelled and sent immediately to provide a night cover for two convoys. One of the Hudson pilots (Flying Officer Rule) next day located a submarine about 150 miles north-east of Sydney. By the time he dropped flares, however, he could see nothing and the indication of the submarine on his radar equipment also disappeared.

On 29th April at 10.36 a.m. the crew of a Fairey Battle on a travel flight over the sea off Newcastle saw an explosion on a ship twelve miles away. The aircraft turned in the direction of the explosion and came on wreckage, boats, rafts and five survivors. About 200 yards away the aircraft crew could see a periscope and the wake of a submarine which had just torpedoed the vessel. It was visible for four minutes after which the submarine slowly submerged and was not seen again. The aircraft then directed a launch to the scene, remaining until it arrived to pick up the survivors. The vessel was the 2,239-ton *Wollongbar*, the fifth submarine victim in less than a month.

On 1st May at 10 a.m. a Catalina on a travel flight from Brisbane to Rathmines saw a submarine. But the Catalina carried no bombs, and could not, therefore, make an attack. That night another Catalina from Rathmines was sent up on anti-submarine patrol in waters through which a convoy was to pass. At 9 p.m. the Catalina found the convoy and its radar equipment picked up an indication from a distance of fourteen miles showing a vessel on a converging course. The captain "homed" on

this indication and from a height of 1,000 feet in poor visibility he and other members of the crew saw what they believed to be a submarine. The captain then dropped depth-charges which missed and his target opened fire on him with machine-guns. He reported later that the machine-gun fire was fairly accurate and continued after his attack but no damage was done to the Catalina. He considered that the submarine was converging on the convoy which, but for his attack, would have been endangered. However, the Catalina had not in fact attacked a submarine at all, but an American tanker *City Service Boston* carrying a cargo of fuel and diesel oil from Los Angeles. It was undamaged and reached Brisbane where an Australian naval staff officer boarded it and interviewed Captain T. Bartolomeo, the master. Bartolomeo described how an aircraft circled wide around the ship and then attacked dropping a bomb fifty yards from the starboard beam. The ship's crew then opened fire on the aircraft with 20-mm cannon and .5-inch machine-guns. An hour and a half before this attack the *City Service Boston* had been following a zig-zag course to avoid a submarine moving on a north-easterly course towards New Caledonia. Bartolomeo reported that this submarine was in sight for twenty minutes, but made no attempt to attack his ship.[9]

Such mistakes were easy to make. Porpoises, whales, sharks and even paravanes trailing behind ships had been objects of suspicion and sometimes of bombing attacks. Aircraft made several attacks on American submarines, fortunately without sinking any, although some were damaged. Very few of the hundreds of airmen engaged in patrolling had ever seen a submarine. They had the difficult and frustrating task of flying thousands upon thousands of miles without seeing the slightest sign of enemy activity. The task of finding a periscope in the broad stretches of the ocean in all sorts of weather was almost impossible. If one was seen, the crew would have only a fleeting glimpse before the submarine dived. Yet the patrols had to be maintained. The presence of patrolling aircraft was likely to force the enemy submarines to remain submerged during the day, although they did not prevent some torpedo attacks being made in daylight hours. One favourable factor was that the convoy routes for shipping were along the coast, close to the R.A.A.F's airfields. Aircraft, therefore, could spend the greater part of their flying time patrolling over the actual convoy route.

These arduous patrolling operations were not kept up every day without considerable cost in lives and equipment. A number of crews and their machines disappeared without trace when at sea. Beaufort aircraft, particularly in 1942 and 1943, were being lost frequently, especially from No. 1 Operational Training Unit at East Sale. A judicial inquiry had been held into statements that materials used in the manufacture of the machines were not adequately tested. Air Vice-Marshal Jones, at a meeting of the Advisory War Council early in May 1943, said that a court

[9] Some days later the *City Service Boston* ran aground and her back was broken. An Australian army rescue party saved 60 members of the crew. Eight men of the rescue party were washed off the rocks. Five were rescued but three lost their lives.

of inquiry into the causes of accidents to Beaufort aircraft had found that the accidents could not be attributed to any one particular cause.

Late in April, more Hudsons and Catalinas were added to the patrol force. On 5th May no fewer than 46 aircraft patrolled off the eastern coast from Thursday Island in the north to Port Phillip Bay in the south, compared with 29 on 4th April. The aircraft engaged were:

| | Sorties flown on 4th April | Sorties flown on 5th May |
|---|---|---|
| Beauforts | 5 | 7 |
| Ansons | 19 | 20 |
| Hudsons | 3 | 9 |
| Vought Sikorsky | 2 | 5 |
| Catalinas | — | 5 |
| | 29 | 46 |

In spite of this increase there were not sufficient aircraft to combat Japanese submarines, but the threat to Australian sea communications was still not considered sufficiently dangerous to justify the release of any aircraft from operations in New Guinea.

Early in May, the Advisory War Council discussed the loss of merchant ships. Admiral Royle, the Chief of the Naval Staff, who was present told members that four naval escorts would now be allotted to each convoy. This was the maximum protection that could be provided with existing naval resources. The decision to provide four escorts and to reduce the number of convoys by about 50 per cent had been taken after representations had been made by the Shipping Control Board. To this extent the Japanese submarine effort had succeeded; double convoys would mean delays in the sailings of ships.

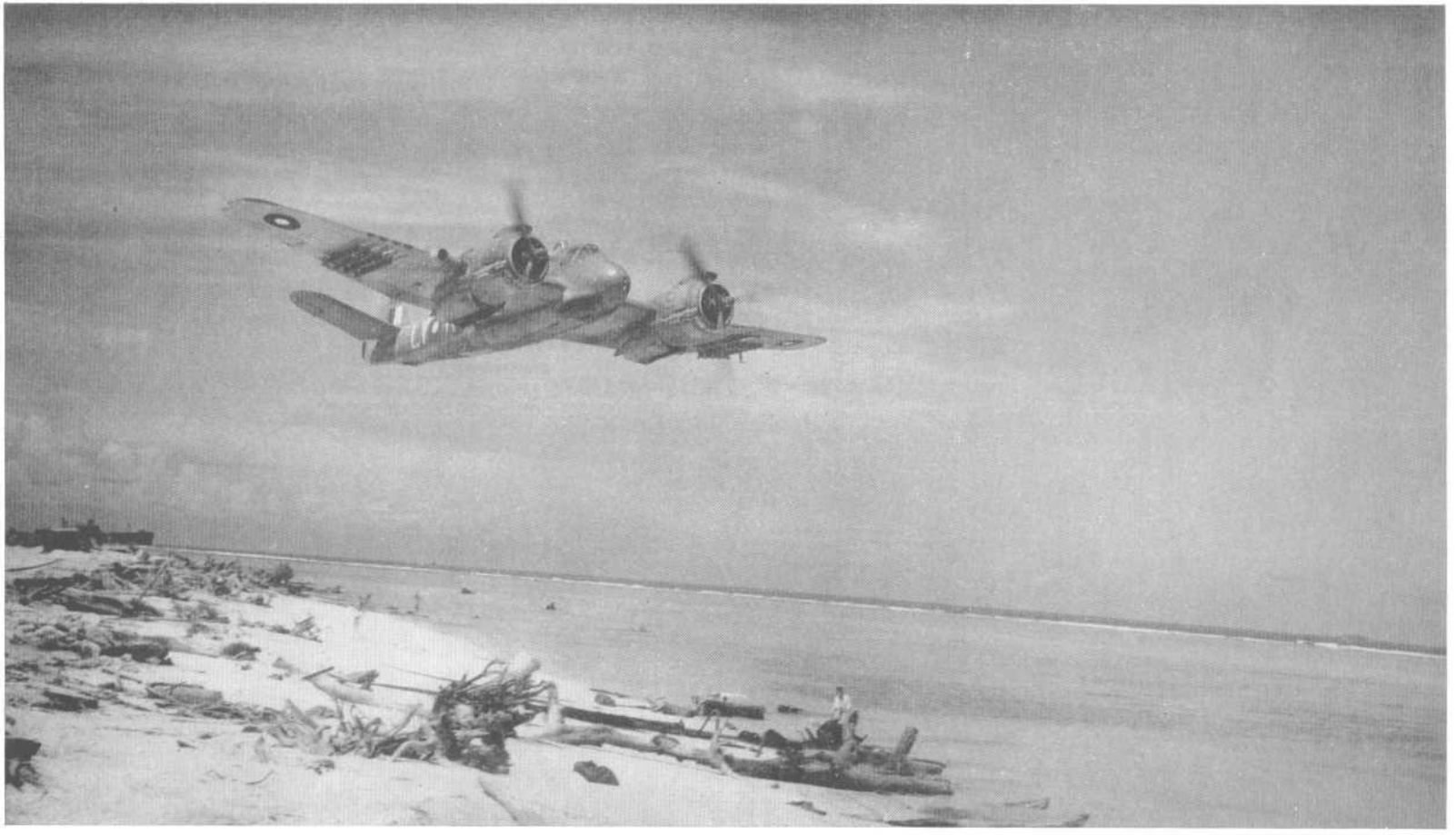
From dawn on 5th May, Ansons of No. 71 Squadron operating from Coff's Harbour carried out patrols over a convoy escorted by an American destroyer. At 1.35 in the afternoon, the Norwegian ship *Fingal* (2,137 tons) was struck by two torpedoes from a Japanese submarine. An Anson in which Sergeant Gillmore[1] was pilot, Flying Officer Sharrad,[2] navigator, and Sergeant Hall,[3] wireless air gunner, was over the convoy at the time of the attack. Immediately the torpedoes struck, Gillmore turned his aircraft in the direction of the ship. Hall saw the wakes of two torpedoes. He told the pilot and the pilot turned the aircraft up the wakes but could not find the submarine. Twelve members of the ship's crew had been lost and three injured.

A week later on 12th May, the *Ormiston* (5,832 tons) was torpedoed in the afternoon while in convoy with both naval and air escort; however, the vessel reached Coff's Harbour under its own steam at a reduced speed and down at the bow end. As soon as the *Ormiston* was attacked messages

[1] F-O G. J. Gillmore, 413569; 71 Sqn. Audit clerk; of Fairfield, NSW; b. Drummoyne, NSW, 15 Jun 1923.

[2] F-Lt M. A. Sharrad, 416716. 71, 11 and 42 Sqns. District clerk; of Kimba, SA; b. Pinnaroo, SA, 9 Aug 1911.

[3] F-O J. L. Hall, 412950. 71, 100 and 36 Sqns. Insurance agent; of Murrurundi, NSW; b. Willow Tree, NSW, 21 Jan 1919.



A Beaufighter of No. 30 Squadron taking off from Noemfoor on 10th November 1944 to attack "targets of opportunity". The eight rockets with which it is armed were particularly effective for water-line attacks against shipping. *(R.A.A.F.)*



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Hurricanes were used widely in the Burma campaign. Primarily fighters, they were also adapted as fighter-bombers, in which role they performed varied tasks. Here a Hurri-bomber, in March 1944, is attacking a bridge on the Tiddim Road which has already been hit by a previous aircraft.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

F-O D. E. F. Garvan of No. 136 Squadron R.A.F., looks on while a ground crew refuel his Spitfire on a Burma airfield in 1944.

were sent to Eastern Area, which immediately increased the air cover, two more Ansons being sent out. There were no casualties in the *Ormiston* and the ship later continued its passage to Sydney at a reduced speed. It was discovered later that the *Caradale* (1,881 tons) had also been attacked by the submarine which torpedoed the *Ormiston.* A torpedo had struck this ship while it was in the convoy, but it had not exploded. At the time, the captain did not report any damage, but later the *Caradale* was found to be making water in No. 3 hold. However, she reached Sydney safely.

An Anson from No. 71 Squadron in which Flying Officer Crewes[4] was pilot, Flying Officer Keith,[5] navigator, and Sergeant Billington,[6] wireless air gunner, took off at 10.40 a.m. on 15th May and flew out to sea to provide an anti-submarine patrol for a convoy of vessels. Nothing untoward happened and at about 1.40 p.m. the Anson left the convoy to return to Lowood. However, at 2 p.m. the crew of the Anson were astonished to see "a ship's life-boat containing 30 live persons". The captain of the Anson immediately signalled one of the vessels in the near-by convoy: "Rescue survivors in water ahead." They appeared to be survivors from a ship but no sinking had been reported in the area. The Anson circled twice and dropped a smoke flare near a remote group of survivors. Petrol shortage then forced it to return to Lowood, where it landed at 3.45 p.m.

Meanwhile, the men and a woman had been taken aboard the American destroyer *Mugford,* and told the story of the sinking of the Australian hospital ship *Centaur,* a disaster which cost 268 lives. On Friday, 14th May, she had been steaming north at a speed of 12 knots when, at 4 a.m., twenty miles north-east of Cape Moreton, there was an explosion on the port side. The ship burst into flames and sank within two minutes. There was no time to send a message or even to launch life-boats. At the time, the ship was illuminated and marked in accordance with the international law governing hospital ships.

At 9 a.m. visibility had fallen and two aircraft which passed over the survivors at this time missed seeing them. Later two more aircraft and two ships passed by without seeing them. Several of the survivors said that, at dawn next morning, a Japanese submarine surfaced near them and remained about twenty minutes. It was about 300 feet long, and had one gun forward of the conning tower.[7] The survivors sighted a fifth aircraft on Saturday morning. Then at 2 p.m. they were seen by the Anson of No. 71 Squadron, thirty-four hours after the sinking.

Immediately the story of the disaster was known ashore, naval vessels and aircraft were sent out to search for more survivors and hunt down

[4] F-Lt O. K. Crewes, 414831. 71 and 43 Sqns. Traveller; of Five Dock, NSW; b. Sydney, 24 May 1915.

[5] F-Lt J. W. Keith, 414240. 71, 20 and 11 Sqns. Clerk; of Hill End, Qld; b. Brisbane, 1 Jan 1923.

[6] W-O C. S. Billington, 411674. 71, 11 and 42 Sqns. Carriage builder; of Strathfield, NSW; b. Hurstville, NSW, 19 Jun 1918. Killed in action 14 Oct 1944.

[7] Most of the survivors were suffering from shock and exposure at this time. It is possible therefore that they were mistaken. There is no way of establishing whether the submarine did surface in this area because all four submarines engaged on the eastern coast at this time were subsequently lost.

the submarine responsible for the attack. An Anson from Lowood found an upturned life-boat next day. Over an area of two miles radius the crew saw four pontoons and ten rafts but no sign of life. The Anson directed a destroyer to the scene but no survivors were found.

The story of the disaster was told to the public on 20th May. Newspapers carried banner headlines on their front pages and editorials condemned the attack. General MacArthur spoke of the enemy's "limitless savagery" and Mr Curtin announced that an immediate and strong protest was being addressed to the Japanese Government.

There was also public criticism of the conduct of anti-submarine operations. On 29th May an article in *Smith's Weekly* asked why it took thirty-six hours to discover the tragedy and the survivors. The article declared: "Circumstances surrounding the loss of the hospital ship *Centaur* on May 14 reflect no credit upon Australian naval and air administration . . . losses on the coast recently have been heavy. They have got to be stopped."

At the next Advisory War Council meeting, on 3rd June, Mr Hughes spoke of "deficiencies in present methods" of anti-submarine warfare. Sir Earle Page asked whether more extensive use could be made of aircraft stationed at airfields along the east coast for the protection of convoys, and asked why aircraft had not gone to the aid of the convoy in which *Ormiston* was torpedoed. In reply Admiral Royle said that the aircraft operated ahead of the convoy in order to keep enemy submarines down and so prevent them getting into a position to attack the convoy. Aircraft could not normally be seen by crews of ships, but arrangements were being made for this to be done in future. Earlier he had assured the council that good progress was being made in fitting aircraft with air-to-surface vessel radar equipment, and escort vessels with detection apparatus.

In order to increase the patrol force available, aircraft on travel flights were ordered to fly over coastal shipping routes as far as possible. Bostock directed the training organisations to keep their crews fully informed of current intelligence. Training aircraft were to carry weapons and keep a sharp lookout for enemy submarines. Bostock signalled Air Force headquarters on 16th May urging that every effort be made immediately to provide one additional general reconnaissance reserve squadron for Eastern Area. This squadron was to remain active until No. 13 Squadron, then at Canberra, could be re-equipped and become effective, or until the situation changed.

In May Admiral Royle, as commander of the recently-constituted South-West Pacific Sea Frontier Force, decided to set up within this force a committee on submarine warfare, to be known as the "Anti-Submarine Warfare Division" of the force. Royle asked that a representative of R.A.A.F. Command be appointed to this committee. Bostock sent this request on to Air Vice-Marshal Jones, and he appointed Wing Commander Courtney,[8] who had had a distinguished record in anti-submarine warfare

[8] Gp Capt E. B. Courtney, MVO. 143; 10 Sqn. Comd 75 Wing 1943-44. Regular air force offr; of Glen Iris, Vic; b. Malvern, Vic, 14 Nov 1914.

with Coastal Command in the United Kingdom. Courtney, however, was not under Bostock's control, but an officer of Air Force headquarters, under the Chief of the Air Staff. General Kenney therefore made a direct request to Jones on 21st June that it was "essential that a suitably qualified officer should represent Allied Air Forces in Anti-Submarine Division deliberations". He said: "The danger of the present arrangement is clearly illustrated by your signal of the 19th June which indicates that denial of direct representation on the Anti-Submarine Division has already resulted in deplorable delay in the transmission of important information to the A.O.C. R.A.A.F. Command." However, Jones declined to grant this request and a final request made by Kenney a month later. The clash of views on this question was an example of the difficulties which arose because there was a division between operational and administrative responsibility in the higher command of the R.A.A.F.

The anti-submarine division of the Sea Frontier Force was staffed by representatives of the navy and air forces, both Australian and American, and its purpose was to coordinate and improve all methods of anti-submarine warfare. However, the key to the situation was the provision of more aircraft, and more escort vessels rather than the appointment of committees, and sufficient aircraft were simply not to be had without withdrawing them from New Guinea.

On 22nd May Mr Curtin personally took up with the Minister for Air, Mr Drakeford, the question of providing more aircraft for anti-submarine patrols. He pointed out that of 303 Beaufort aircraft delivered to the R.A.A.F., by 8th May 1943 fifty-one had been lost and only 121 of those remaining were fit for service. Mr Curtin said: "In the nineteen weeks period from 2 Jan to 8 May, the average unserviceability was 52 per cent and although this ratio is exceeded slightly by both Hudsons and Catalinas among other operational types, the Beaufort has had the most consistently high unserviceability rate of any operational type. It is perhaps impossible that the Beaufort ratio should be reduced to the Spitfire ratio of 22 per cent, but a reduction to even 40 per cent would mean, at present, an addition of 26 aircraft each week."

Vessels, aircraft and radar stations ashore continued to have further contacts with possible enemy submarines during the remainder of May but there were no further sinkings. On 18th May the radar station on Fitzroy Island, 15 miles east of Cairns, obtained a contact and reported being jammed while trying to send a message. On 28th May a Beaufort from Bundaberg reported seeing a submarine which dived before an attack could be made.

The intensity of the daily patrolling and searching carried out by R.A.A.F. aircraft in this period can be gauged from the daily situation report for 4th June reproduced below.

On 4th June, some 20 miles east of Cape Moreton, an American motor vessel, the *Edward Chambers* (4,113 tons), saw a submarine about 12,000 yards away. The *Edward Chambers* fired twelve rounds at the submarine,

MOST SECRET.
SITREP NO. 841.
1700K/3—0500K/4 JUNE.
PAGE NO. 8.

ROUTINE SEARCHES AND PATROLS.

| MISSION | TASK NO. | AIRCRAFT | RESULTS |
|---|---|---|---|
| A.O.R. DARWIN. | | | |
| Coast patrol—DARWIN—CAPE FORD—DALY RIVER. | BAT-95 | 1 Vengeance | Negative. |
| Patrol Area "Z" | HUG-26 | 4 Hudsons | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol on Force "HG" | HUG-27 | 1 Hudson | Convoy not located. |
| A.O.R. TOWNSVILLE. | | | |
| Patrol Area "N" | HOR-28 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Patrol Area "P" a.m. | HOR-29 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Patrol Area "P" p.m. | HOR-30 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Fighter cover for MERAUKE | HOR-73 | 12 Boomerangs | Negative. |
| 5TH AIR FORCE. | | | |
| Shipping Escort | WAR-30 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| A.O.R. SYDNEY. | | | |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "VZ" | BUN-46 | 3 B'forts | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "C" p.m. | CAM-17 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Patrol Blue Route | CAM-73 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "XV" a.m. | CH-6 | 2 B'forts | Negative. |
| Search plotted area | CH-7 | 2 Ansons | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "VZ" | LOW-28 | 2 Ansons | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "XY" p.m. | LOW-29 | 3 Ansons | Negative. |
| Patrol Area E. BRISBANE | LOW-30 | 4 Ansons | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "XU" | LOW-31 | 2 B'forts | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "C" a.m. | NOW-35 | 2 Ansons | Negative. |
| Outer A/S Patrol Force "WU" | RAT-43 | 2 VS. | Negative. |
| Locate and guide ship | RAT-75 | 2 VS. | Completed. |
| A.O.R. MELBOURNE. | | | |
| Inner A/S Patrol Force "UX" | LAV-15 | 6 Ansons | Negative. |
| Square Patrol Force "UX" | LAV-16 | 2 Ansons | Negative. |
| Square Patrol Force "D" | LAV-17 | 2 Ansons | Negative. |
| A.O.R. PERTH. | | | |
| Patrol Sector "A" W. of GERALDTON | CRA-15 | 1 Catalina | Negative. |
| Patrol Sectors 2 and 3 NNE EXMOUTH GULF | CRA-16 | 2 Catalinas | Not reported. |
| Patrol Sector "B" NW of PEARCE | PEA-18 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Patrol Inner Shipping Lane PEARCE—ALBANY | PEA-19 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Patrol Outer Shipping Lane ALBANY—PEARCE | PEA-20 | 1 B'fort | Negative. |
| Shipping Escort | PEA-21 | 2 B'forts | Negative. |

which replied with nine rounds, but no torpedoes were fired. After five minutes the submarine submerged, having failed to hit the ship. Three Beauforts of No. 32 Squadron from Camden, operating from dusk on 4th June to dawn on 5th June, and five Ansons of No. 71 Squadron from Lowood on a creeping-line-ahead search all next day failed to find this submarine. Again on 14th June a Beaufort operating out of Coff's Harbour at night sighted a wake which appeared to be caused by a vessel moving north and also registered a response from its air-to-surface vessel equipment. Both the wake and the radar response disappeared within a minute.

At 5.15 in the afternoon, two days later, a submarine fired torpedoes at vessels in a convoy 60 miles south-east of Coff's Harbour. One of the torpedoes hit the ship *Portmar*. Petrol on board exploded and the ship immediately caught fire both fore and aft. Ammunition then exploded and the vessel sank in seven minutes. One member of the crew and a passenger were lost. During the day the convoy of which the *Portmar* was a member had been covered by an anti-submarine patrol of four Ansons of No. 71 Squadron, but none of these aircraft saw the enemy submarine. The last Anson to cover the convoy was due to return to base, and was flying ahead along the convoy's track, when the crew saw a fire on one of the ships 18 miles behind. The captain returned to the convoy, found the *Portmar* ablaze and sinking, and radioed to base: "Ship on fire cause unknown." Shortage of petrol then forced the Anson to return to base. Soon after the attack on the *Portmar* the American naval *LST.469* in the same convoy was struck by a torpedo. There were a number of fatal casualties on board, but the vessel remained afloat and H.M.A.S. *Deloraine,* after removing the survivors, towed *LST.469* towards Coff's Harbour, until the tow was taken over by a naval tug which successfully hauled her to Sydney.

That night three Beauforts (two from Bundaberg and one from Coff's Harbour) searched the area thoroughly without finding the enemy submarine. The first Beaufort led the convoy out of the area in which the attack was made. The hunt for the submarine continued next day with Anson aircraft but without avail. On 18th June, however, one of three Beauforts operating out of Coff's Harbour recorded responses on its radar and just after midnight saw a submarine on the surface. The captain (Pilot Officer Harrison[9]) made a direct attack, dropping a stick of three depth-charges (250-lb torpex). The crew did not see the explosion. The submarine dived to conning-tower depth and a fourth depth-charge was dropped half a submarine length ahead of it. Both attacks were made from 30 to 50 feet after a shallow dive. After the second attack the submarine came to the surface and appeared to be trailing oil. In spite of the semi-darkness the crew reported seeing fuel oil extending two miles long and about a quarter of a mile wide. Harrison continued to shadow the submarine, dropping flares to attract surface vessels and the relieving

[9] F-O A. L. Harrison, 408190. 7, 32 and 100 Sqns, 530 Sqn USAAF. Orchardist; of Cradoc, Tas; b. Cradoc, 29 Aug 1915. Killed in action 29 Oct 1944.

aircraft. There was now quite a good chance that either an aircraft or a naval escort might destroy the submarine. The relieving Beaufort (captained by Flying Officer Cushway[10]) saw one of the flares and found the submarine on the surface some thirty minutes later. The submarine was now moving at from 10 to 12 knots. Cushway dived to the attack and released a stick of four depth-charges from 200 feet, but they overshot the submarine by about 40 feet. Cushway flew over a corvette escorting the convoy and tried to attract its attention to the submarine. Failing to do this he flew back to the submarine and machine-gunned it, hoping also to attract the corvette by this means. This failed and Cushway made a second gunnery attack. The submarine returned his fire but without scoring any hits. A third Beaufort, sent out after Cushway's machine had returned to base, was unable to find the submarine. A naval vessel later obtained a sample of the oil seen by the airmen and established that it was not from a submarine but was burnt oil, probably from the sunken *Portmar*.

The following day a great effort was made to find and destroy the submarine. A large area of sea was continuously searched by twelve Ansons, and reserves of strike aircraft including two Vengeances of No. 23 Squadron and four from No. 24 were ready with engines already warmed to attack as soon as the submarine was found, but it was not seen again. The submarine was not sunk but No. 32 Squadron was credited with damaging it. A good opportunity of sinking this submarine had been lost when communications between the Beauforts and naval escorts broke down.

Japanese submarine attacks on the eastern coast diminished during July but the R.A.A.F. remained alert and continued to maintain extensive patrol operations to protect shipping. In that month boisterous and foggy weather tended to nullify the efforts of the air force in keeping watch, but at the same time heavy seas and bad visibility afforded the convoys additional protection from the submarines.

To improve the efficiency of the air effort against the submarines, Air Vice-Marshal Anderson, commanding Eastern Area, asked permission of R.A.A.F. Command to make a change of policy in the anti-submarine warfare methods. He asked that, where it was considered essential to give a complete twenty-four hour coverage over vital areas in which submarines were known to be operating, the policy should be to do this rather than to escort convoys in less dangerous areas. R.A.A.F. Command agreed to this policy "where the position of a submarine was established beyond all doubt . . . after consultation with the appropriate naval authorities".

In July Air Vice-Marshal Cole, who toured R.A.A.F. areas on an inspection, made a similar suggestion. He pointed out that an "offensive policy against submarines is essential in lieu of the present defensive protection of convoys which, in the light of the shortage of aircraft, is uneconomical. Whilst enemy submarines operating off the Australian coast

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[10] F-Lt D. L. G. Cushway, 26847. 32 and 40 Sqns. Bar steward; of Adelaide; b. Kensington, SA, 8 Nov 1917.

are so few, if a submarine is sighted it must be harried till destroyed."[1] In reply, Bostock pointed out that the need for "an offensive policy against submarines was well known. The matter had been exhaustively discussed with the Anti-Submarine Division of the Sea Frontier Force." "However," he said, "it is just the shortage of aircraft which forces us to the present defensive role."

While these discussions continued, the submarine menace had been rapidly lessening. The *Portmar* was the last sinking off the east coast in 1943. The Japanese had withdrawn their submarines from the Australian coast and operated them for a time round the Solomon Islands. It was perhaps fortunate for Australia that the Japanese called off this submarine campaign when they did, because with the dearth of aircraft and trained crews, and the great area of ocean that had to be covered, continued attacks on merchant shipping might have had serious results, especially if Japan had increased the submarine force beyond the four that were engaged at this time.[2]

The R.A.A.F. and the R.A.N. had failed to sink any of the enemy submarines which operated off the Australian coast in 1943. Nevertheless their activities greatly hampered the enemy, forcing the submarines to stay submerged for long periods and thereby reducing their mobility. The existence of air and naval protection was essential also for keeping up the morale of the merchant seamen. Its existence undoubtedly prevented the high losses that would have followed had the submarines had unrestrained access to Allied shipping.

In the early part of the war Japanese submarines had attacked Allied naval vessels with some success. They had assisted in the destruction of two large American carriers and had sunk several cruisers and destroyers. Allied counter-measures disposed of many Japanese submarines, and many more were later used to carry food and equipment to isolated Japanese bases, thereby reducing the force available for use against Allied shipping. Commander Nakajima said after the war: "The exact use of submarines was the point of much discussion at headquarters, but we were forced to let them be used for supply because of the shortage of warships and supply ships of all kinds." On the other hand, the American submarine attack on Japan was most effective. The Japanese themselves were greatly surprised with the efficiency and extensive use of American submarines which did great damage to their shipping and eventually severed their supply lines.

On 29th July, a Catalina aircraft of No. 20 Squadron delivered an attack on the American submarine *Tuna,* believing it to be an enemy vessel. The Catalina was captained by Squadron Leader Stokes, commanding officer of the squadron; but his action was blameless because the submarine, being in an area of unrestricted bombing, failed to identify

[1] See J. Herington, *Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943,* Vol III, Chapter 16, in this series, for a discussion of a similar problem in the Atlantic.

[2] These four were all "*I*" class submarines. *I 178* was sunk off San Cristobal on 25 Aug 1943 by a US destroyer. US destroyers and destroyer escorts sank *I 180* off Kodiak on 26 Apr 1944, and *I 174* south of Truk on 29 Apr 1944. *I 177* was destroyed off Angaur on 19 Nov 1944.

itself to him. Stokes had picked up a radar indication of the submarine about 56 miles north-north-west of Woodlark Island. He dropped a flare near the *Tuna* which began to submerge rapidly. Stokes dropped depth-charges and as the Catalina came in on a second run to attack with 250-lb general-purpose bombs the *Tuna* came to the surface and belatedly flashed a signal identifying itself as a friendly vessel. The signal came only just in time to prevent the second attack. The first attack caused damage which forced the submarine to return to base. Stokes later reported other instances in which submarines had failed to carry out correct procedure to identify themselves and to report their movements accurately.[3]

In the emergency conditions caused by the enemy submarines, Air Commodore Cobby in North-Eastern Area decided to use Vengeances for convoy-escort duties, although these aircraft were not well suited to this type of work because the crew of two had to employ most of their time navigating and flying, and could not search the sea thoroughly. Also their range, like that of the Ansons, was too short. Occasionally they failed even to find the convoy which they were to cover.

The extensive anti-submarine patrolling in 1943 continued to cause loss of life and equipment as numbers of aircraft disappeared without trace. On 4th August a Vengeance of No. 12 Squadron on patrol for a convoy made a forced landing at Ruby Reef. A Catalina from No. 20 Squadron which had been sent to patrol the sea area west of Bougainville was diverted to Ruby Reef shortly after take-off. It landed successfully and, after picking up the crew of the Vengeance and returning them to Cairns, it continued with its mission. On 15th August a Walrus aircraft of No. 9 Squadron, on a clearing search for a convoy, made a forced landing near Green Island. The crew escaped in a dinghy and were picked up later by a naval boat which also towed the Walrus to Cairns. Two days later a Catalina crashed into the sea while on a test flight. Two of the crew were rescued from the sea by a crashboat, but the remainder were lost.

No. 11 Squadron was sent down from Cairns to Rathmines in August to take part in the anti-submarine operations. Catalina aircraft were the most suitable for anti-submarine work and the use of this squadron eased the burden placed upon the reserve squadrons. Another Catalina squadron (No. 43) had now been formed and had begun operations. Tired crews from Nos. 20 and 43 were to be sent south to the comparatively lighter duty of patrolling the Tasman Sea, and to enjoy leave in the capital cities on the east coast, when they could be relieved from flying duty.

In Western Australia, the Beauforts of No. 14 Squadron, and American Catalinas, flew hundreds of patrols in 1943. No. 14 Squadron flew a daily patrol from Pearce round the coast via Cape Leeuwin to Albany in the far south, while a second aircraft flew in the opposite direction from Albany to Pearce. Other Beauforts patrolled northwards from Gerald-

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[3] There was a touch of heartlessness in a request which came some days later from 20 Sqn asking that the submarine captain be asked the extent of damage and the effectiveness of the Catalina attack. No reply seems to have been received from the captain of the submarine!

ton to Exmouth Gulf. Throughout the year this squadron saw no enemy activity at all. But the long periods of patrol duty were relieved to some extent by the crews carrying out the task of reporting the position of the ships that moved in and out of Fremantle and around the south-west corner of the State to-and-from the east.

On 9th September a Beaufort of this squadron, captained by Flying Officer Aitken,[4] took off from Busselton on a clearing search seaward from D'Entrecasteaux Point to Rottnest Island. At 2 p.m. Aitken's wireless operator signalled that they had sighted the motor vessel *Nordnes,* after which nothing more was seen or heard of the aircraft. The captain of the *Nordnes* reported later in Fremantle that when the aircraft passed over it was apparently behaving normally. An exhaustive search made by aircraft of Nos. 14, 25 (R.A.A.F.) and 52 (United States Navy) Squadrons failed to find any trace of the machine or its crew, and on 11th September the search was abandoned. On 24th October another Beaufort of this squadron was lost when it crashed near Northampton killing six men. Two others escaped by making parachute descents.

In October, Admiral Royle reported to the Advisory War Council that there had been no submarine activity off the Australian coast since 16th June, but activity off the Solomon Islands and New Guinea had increased.

Indeed, at the beginning of 1943 the Japanese were threatening the security of Australia, but by the end of the year they had been thrown back in every Pacific war theatre and Allied forces were being assembled for further blows. Rabaul had been so heavily bombarded from the air that it was difficult for the Japanese to maintain it as a base from which submarines could operate against shipping off the eastern coast of Australia.

By November there was still no sign of submarine attacks and Royle therefore proposed to the Government that naval escorts should be discontinued for convoys between Australian ports south of Brisbane. This was desirable not only because the danger of attacks had diminished but because there was an increased demand for escort vessels to convoy shipping between Milne Bay and Finschhafen. The cessation of convoys would also result in a 20 per cent increase in trade. After discussion the Council agreed to the abolition of escorts for convoys, but only south of Newcastle.

On 8th December, therefore, orders to this effect were issued. R.A.A.F. Command followed this action by issuing an order stating there was to be no close air escort of shipping during daylight hours south of Newcastle, but the area to the north was declared "a standing area of probability" and close escort would be given in daylight. Though shipping south of Newcastle would therefore not be given close air escort, air and surface patrols were to be maintained off local points such as Gabo,

[4] F-O A. M. Aitken, 415570; 14 Sqn. Accountant; of Armadale, WA; b. Narrogin, WA, 9 Jan 1920. Killed on air operations 9 Sep 1943.

Sydney and Newcastle. In addition air and surface striking forces were to be available when required.

Seamen in Melbourne refused to take their ships to sea when told that naval escorting of convoys was to stop, and a total of twenty-eight ships were held up. As a result, R.A.A.F. Command instructed Eastern Area and Southern Area to "assist in any way you can in putting aircraft in the air over shipping routes as a temporary measure to avoid the possible strikes which the navy fear . . . this is only an interim measure until such time as the navy advise that the seamen are satisfied that the shipping is still being watched over by the air forces". On 21st December Mr Curtin ordered the men to return to their ships and when they failed to report for duty, 300 were dismissed.

Mr W. Bird, secretary of the Victorian Branch of the Seamen's Union, said the seamen feared a repetition of sinkings if convoy escorts were dropped. He invited the naval authorities to talk to the seamen in Melbourne explaining the new position at sea. This was done, and on 25th December it was announced that the merchant seamen had returned to their ships. The hold-up was given publicity in the newspapers but no reference could be made to the men's grievance, namely the suspension of convoy escorts, since this information would have aided the enemy.

As a result of the reduction of daily aircraft patrols the pressure on R.A.A.F. resources was considerably reduced. This reduction released crews for duty in the north.

R.A.A.F. Command was responsible not only for protecting merchant shipping from submarine attacks but for guarding the major Australian cities and industrial centres such as Newcastle from air attacks which the enemy might launch from aircraft carriers or from aircraft-carrying cruisers which the enemy was known to have.

It was not likely that enemy naval vessels could penetrate far towards the Australian coast without being discovered either by patrolling aircraft or by radar. Nevertheless, if one succeeded and launched an air attack without warning, it is doubtful whether the obsolete aircraft available and the untried fighter-defence organisation would be able to cope adequately with it. This, however, was a risk that had to be taken.

The real fighter defence of the vital southern areas depended on the rapid movement southward of squadrons in New Guinea through the chain of operational bases placed around the coast. These squadrons could, on arrival, use the fighter defence organisation, radar and information network built up and maintained by the R.A.A.F. area commands.

The R.A.A.F. had made the air-defence system operated in Great Britain its model. The country was divided into areas each with fixed fighter-control units. By February 1943 there were eight fixed and three mobile units. The organisation was in existence but, except in North-Western Area, the fighter aircraft available in April 1943 were few and mostly obsolete in design. They included Kittyhawk, Airacobra, Buffalo and Boomerang aircraft. Area commanders frequently asked for more and

better aircraft but had to accept what could be spared from the front-line. By the time more up-to-date fighters were available, the danger had diminished.

Fighter defence depended greatly on radar equipment for advance information on raiding aircraft. In 1942 radar equipment had not been satisfactory because its range had been too short. It gave sufficient warning to ground defences but not enough to allow fighters to gain height to reach the enemy before bombs were dropped. By 1943 it had improved. It was considered in 1942 that 90 stations were needed to give a full radar cover for Australia, but by early 1943 there were still only 27 radar stations operating on the mainland, leaving many gaps through which enemy aircraft could pass without being detected. There were only three stations in the whole of Western Australia. As late as 1944 the Cape Leveque station on the north-west coast when working at its maximum efficiency could obtain "plots" of only 60 miles to seaward. The nearest fighter aircraft (Boomerangs of No. 85 Squadron) were based at Broome, 89 miles away. "Thus with an enemy aircraft approaching at over 200 miles an hour, fighter interception is impossible."[5]

In some of the remote areas of Australia radar stations were established and maintained only after great difficulties had been overcome. Construction of camps was often held up by lack of necessary materials. A month after the work had begun on a radar station on Bathurst Island the men were still awaiting the arrival of iron, cement, nails and tools. At this station, technical equipment was late arriving and these difficulties were added to by the extreme heat and humidity, and the fact that equipment had to be hauled up a sandy 200-foot slope. When construction was finished technical breakdowns were frequent and few units carried spare parts. Apart from the physical difficulties the men found life on a radar station monotonous and lonely. Mail and comforts arrived only occasionally. Because they were so isolated the men tended to lose interest in their appearance and surroundings.

Each fighter sector needed 310 men to work it and manpower was becoming scarce by 1943. Air Commodore McCauley, Deputy Chief of the Air Staff, pointed out in February 1943 that "with the air force approaching the 100,000 mark in strength, and the general scarcity of manpower, it was difficult to justify the numbers held down in Fighter Sector Headquarters".[6] It was proposed that the fighter defence organisation south of the Tropic of Capricorn should be reduced in strength. However, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock disagreed because of the danger from "sporadic carrier-borne attacks against our very vulnerable national targets adjacent to the big centres of population in the south . . . one carrier in a surprise attack could, if successful, cause enormous damage to our war production and on this ground alone ordinary defence security dictates that the fighter defence organisation must instantly be available at

[5] Air Commodore R. J. Brownell, AOC, Western Area, to AOC, RAAF Command.

[6] The actual strength on 17th February was 118,568, including 15,598 overseas.

maximum efficiency even if the actual fighters are below adequate number".

A certain amount of pruning was done, however, releasing 250 men. This was achieved by reducing the organisation which had been capable of coping with several raids at once, to one which could handle one raid only. Savings of manpower were also effected in housekeeping staff. The units were kept fully manned during the daylight hours only. All duties were under constant review and members of the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force and older men were given duties which were at first only handled by men trained as aircrew. Fighter-control work was not liked by pilots and there was often an undercurrent of "lack of enthusiasm among those assigned to this duty".[7]

Effective defence called for well-manned airfields, as well as fighter aircraft. There were sufficient of these by 1943 and there were a number of airfields used for training and other purposes which could be quickly brought into use for operations in an emergency.

Late in 1942 the American Navy had asked that an airfield be built and a fighter squadron provided to protect a submarine base to be established at Exmouth Gulf. The main submarine base for operations in the Indian Ocean and the Netherlands East Indies was at Fremantle, but another was wanted farther north at Exmouth Gulf. A site was selected for the airfield at Yanrey and the War Cabinet approved its construction. Before the airfield was built, however, it was decided to move to Potshot (later named Learmonth). No. 76 (Kittyhawk) Squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Truscott, moved to near-by Onslow in February and to Potshot in March when the airfield was completed. In April, however, this squadron was ordered to move to Bankstown prior to returning to New Guinea and a flight of No. 85 Squadron equipped with Boomerang fighters replaced it.

The fighter defence of the submarine base received its first test when the area was raided by Japanese aircraft in May. Two aircraft came over the area between 10.55 and 11.50 p.m. on the night of the 20th. The incoming raiders were detected by the two radar stations (Nos. 314 and 310), and, at 10.40 p.m., two Boomerangs were ordered into the air to intercept, but they failed to find the enemy aircraft, which dropped a bomb harmlessly into Exmouth Gulf. The following night two enemy aircraft reconnoitred Exmouth Gulf again by moonlight. They dropped nine bombs in the gulf area without causing any damage. Again two Boomerangs of No. 85 Squadron were sent up to intercept. The pilot of one (Flying Officer Wettenhall[8]) saw two exhaust flames about 3,000

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[7] In September 1942, Bostock had expressed to RAAF Headquarters his "grave concern" about the state of Fighter-Sector Headquarters. He said: "The standard of the commanders is admittedly low, for a number of reasons, chiefly poor material, hurried training, lack of opportunity for further training and above all, experience by which to measure the efficiency of their sector . . . many adverse circumstances are responsible for this state of affairs and all the blame must not be laid upon Sector Commanders."

[8] F-Lt L. Wettenhall, 400109. 24, 25, 79 and 85 Sqns. Solicitor; of Malvern, Vic; b. Malvern, 28 Jul 1915. Killed in action 31 Dec 1943.

feet below. He dived towards them, but, after following for some time, had to return to base because of petrol shortage.

Soon after these night raids the American naval authorities decided to abandon Exmouth Gulf as a submarine base and withdraw their installations to Fremantle. The base gave no protection to submarines from the cyclonic weather which develops during part of the year. However, Western Area retained their R.A.A.F. establishments at Learmonth and Yanrey for use as a staging base to the north and for seaward reconnaissance. The last alarm during 1943 in Western Area came on 24th September when an "air raid warning yellow" was issued. The "all clear" was sounded later, however, when it was found that a flock of birds had been mistaken for a hostile aircraft!

CHAPTER 10

# WHICH ROAD TO TOKYO?

IN 1943 it seemed certain that the war in the Pacific would not end until some time after Germany had been defeated. The military survival of Japan would depend on whether Germany could hold Russia in the east and at the same time beat back operation OVERLORD which Britain and the United States had decided to launch against the French coast in the spring of 1944. The Japanese leaders drew little comfort from events on the eastern front where the Russian offensive of the autumn and winter of 1943 had achieved an enormous drain on German military strength; but they clung to the belief that attempts on the strongly-held western wall would be defeated. Admiral Nomura, for example, said afterwards: "They did not think that Germany would be defeated. Even at the time of the Normandy landings most people thought that this landing would be a very difficult operation, and they did not think that the Allied armies would so quickly continue on to Germany's defence line. They were disillusioned."

Although Allied resources of men and weapons were now being built up to big proportions there were still grave shortages, and the Pacific commanders, because of the agreed global strategy, continued to receive only what could be spared from the European theatres. General Marshall, the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, reporting on the problems that confronted the Combined Chiefs of Staff in the allocation of means said:

> Victory in this global war depended on the successful execution of OVERLORD. That must not fail. Yet the Japanese could not be permitted meanwhile to entrench in their stolen empire, and China must not be allowed to fall victim to further Japanese assaults. Allied resources were searched through again and again, and strategy reconsidered in the light of the deficiencies. These conclusions seemed inescapable: France must be invaded in 1944, to shorten the war by facilitating the advance westward of the Soviet forces. At the same time German technological advances such as in the development of atomic explosives made it imperative that we attack before these terrible weapons could be turned against us. In addition, the pressure on the Japanese in the Pacific must not be relaxed. Communications with China must be reopened. Resources were allocated accordingly. The balance was extremely delicate but we had to go ahead.[1]

By December 1943 the Allies could claim only a modest progress in the war against Japan. It is true that all along the great Pacific perimeter, which stretched a distance equal almost to the equator, advances had been made, but the gains were limited. In the Aleutians, Kiska had been occupied on 15th August 1943, but the victory there was a hollow one since the Japanese had hastily withdrawn as soon as it became evident that the Americans were preparing to attack.[2] Later, the Aleutian air

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[1] *Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, July 1, 1943 to June 30, 1945*, p. 27.

[2] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV (1950), p. 391, state that "not a single Japanese was ever encountered by ground forces on Kiska". Harry L.

force raided Paramushiro but losses were heavy and thereafter this force assumed a defensive role. American marines had captured key islands in the Gilberts late in 1943. MacArthur's ELKTON offensive had been successful, but in twelve months campaigning had gained only a relatively short distance (from Buna to Saidor and Cape Gloucester) on the road to Japan.

Yet, in spite of the limited progress, there were growing signs of Japanese weakness. The air fighting in the Solomons and around Rabaul and New Guinea had so reduced Japanese local strength in the air that Admiral Koga had been unable to carry out the planned defence of the Gilbert Islands when Admiral Spruance attacked in November. Koga's original plan was for Rabaul-based navy aircraft to fly from Rabaul to the Gilberts where they would attack the American invasion convoy and then land on airfields in the Gilberts and Marshalls. But the attrition in the Bismarck Islands was so severe that the original plan could not be given effect. Nearly the whole of the *III Air Fleet* had been expended. Koga, having insufficient air cover for his surface fleet, decided not to risk a major clash with the American fleet and consequently the Japanese garrisons in the Gilberts were abandoned to their fate, although the 3,500 well-entrenched Japanese soldiers at Tarawa made the American landing there on 20th November both difficult and costly.

Admiral Nimitz, who commanded the central Pacific drive, which proceeded concurrently with the MacArthur-Halsey operations farther south, now turned his attention to the seizure of atolls in the Marshall Islands. After heavy air and naval bombardment, the 7th American Division landed on Kwajalein on 31st January 1944, and on 19th February a marine force seized Eniwetok atoll which was within heavy bomber range of Truk. Truk now came under air bombardment and Admiral Koga decided that his fleet would risk destruction from the American fast carrier aircraft if it remained at this base. As mentioned earlier, he had therefore ordered his air fleet to move to Singapore where replacement pilots were to be trained, and his main surface units were ordered to go to the Palaus, and, the reader will recall, as a result of these moves, the Japanese fleet escaped the heavy strikes laid on against Truk by Spruance on 17th and 18th February. Koga went to Tokyo in this period and persuaded the Imperial General Staff not to employ major forces in attempts to hold islands beyond the Marianas and Palau. At the end of February in order to conserve his remaining aircraft for a major engagement with the American Fleet Koga ordered the naval land-based aircraft at Rabaul to Truk. Koga was convinced that the main American attack was coming from New Guinea towards the Philippines and he therefore set up his headquarters at Davao on Mindanao.

The Japanese left garrisons behind on by-passed islands and atolls and expected they would fight to the last and gain time for the preparation

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Coles, author of Chapter 11 commented: "... responsible commanders in the North Pacific gained little prestige by combat-loading over 30,000 men to send them against an island, vigorously bombarded, which had been deserted for a fortnight."

of strong inner defences. The Allies, however, by-passed most of these garrisons, cut off their supplies and attacked them from the air. The American historian, Richard Watson, has pointed out that the Allied tactics were similar to those used with such success by the Japanese earlier in the war. He wrote:

> The enemy's tactics, which included the device of passing by certain points of resistance in accordance with a plan to reduce them at leisure or merely to leave them to the ultimate penalties of isolation and blockade, resembled those that were to be employed later by Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur in their offensives of 1943 and 1944. Indeed, General MacArthur had been the war's first victim of a type of warfare he subsequently would make peculiarly his own.[3]

Japanese aircraft production in 1944 (28,220 aircraft) was almost double the 1943 figure (16,295) but could scarcely compete with Allied production. America alone was producing 8,800 monthly by November 1943, compared with 2,972 monthly in January 1942. (Australian production for December 1943—Beauforts, Boomerangs and Wirraways—totalled 52 aircraft.) In April 1943 the Japanese Navy had a total of 2,980 operational aircraft, compared with a total of 6,598 twelve months later, although in this period they lost 6,334.

Japan in June 1944 had not yet suffered direct bombardment (except for the Doolittle raid in April 1942), but her industry was from the start quite unable to cope with the requirements of a war against Britain and America. The anticipated benefits from the "southern resources areas", which were expected to make good the known deficiencies, had not come up to expectations, chiefly because the Japanese had lost so much shipping. In 1943, 17 per cent of army supplies shipped from Japan were sunk, in 1944 the figure was to grow to 30 per cent. Steel was very scarce by 1943 and as a result the building of battleships and aircraft carriers was stopped. By mid-1944 it was clear to informed Japanese that industrial disaster was descending on the country. The quality of Japanese production was high, but they were unable to produce everything they needed in sufficient quantity. In addition to lacking the raw material, there were not enough Japanese workmen with the skill and mechanical training needed to mass-produce on the American scale.

Late in 1943, following serious losses of shipping to submarines and to aircraft in and round Rabaul, the *Combined Escort Fleet* was created in an endeavour to reduce the sinkings by providing convoy protection. In spite of this, merchant ship losses at Truk and in the South China Sea during February 1944 had been the greatest of any month in the war. Convoying gave some protection against submarines but increased the danger from air attack. Minelaying operations, in which three of the R.A.A.F's Catalina squadrons were taking part, complicated the enemy problem by forcing ships out of shallow water into waters where submarines could operate.

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[3] In Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I (1948), p. 403.

When Mr Churchill, President Roosevelt and General Chiang Kai-shek had met at the Cairo conference in November 1943 they had issued a joint declaration of their war aims in the Pacific. They demanded the unconditional surrender of Japan as they had demanded the unconditional surrender of Germany. The declaration was prefaced by a statement of the Allies' determination "to bring unrelenting pressure against their brutal enemies by sea, land and air". The declaration read:

> The three great Allies are fighting this war to restrain and punish the aggression of Japan. They covet no gain for themselves and have no thought of territorial expansion. It is their purpose that Japan shall be stripped of all the islands in the Pacific which she has seized or occupied since the beginning of the first World War in 1914, and that all territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa and Pescadores shall be restored to the Republic of China. Japan will also be expelled from all other territories which she has taken by violence and greed. The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent. With these objects in view the three Allies in harmony with those United Nations at war with Japan, will continue to persevere in serious and prolonged operations necessary for the procurement of unconditional surrender of Japan.

The Japanese reply to the declaration was an announcement that a famous Japanese swordsmith had forged a sword for presentation to the Indian, Subhas Bose, "who is at present making final preparations for the Indian National Army's advance to New Delhi".

General Tojo, interviewed after the war, declared that the Cairo declaration was an obstacle to Japanese efforts towards peace. He said: "Since unconditional surrender was utterly out of the question in those days, such a declaration made it impossible for Japan to work toward peace even if she should want to do so . . . popular sentiment in Japan was such as to render the declaration a serious hindrance to peace efforts."

The two major problems with which the grand strategists had to deal in the Pacific theatre were firstly: What men and materials could be spared for the Pacific war? and secondly: Which direction would be taken by the forces assigned to the advance towards the Japanese homeland?

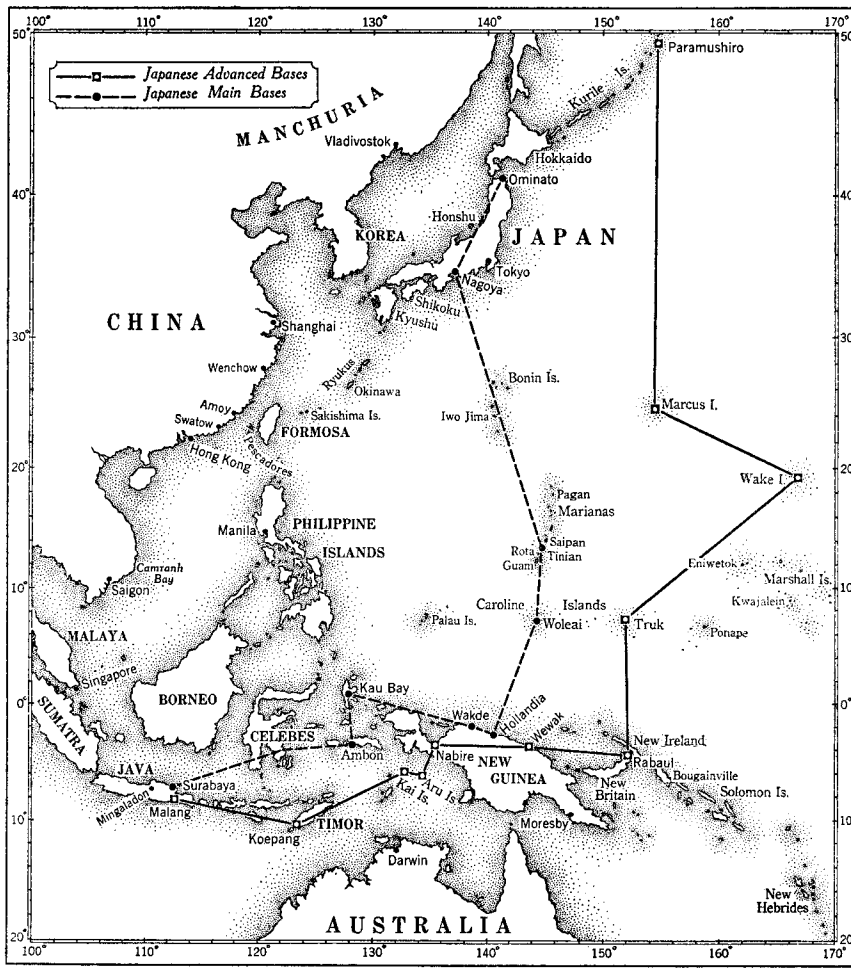
Four main plans were under consideration at different times.

1. General MacArthur proposed that the main attack should be from Australia through New Guinea and the Philippines.
2. Mr Churchill was anxious to see the main British attack proceed from the India-Burma area through the Malay barrier.
3. Admiral Nimitz wished the main attack to go through the Central Pacific.
4. A fourth plan for Allied entry into the Kurile Islands and Soviet territory in the North Pacific was conditional on Soviet collaboration.

In a report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 2nd December 1943 the Combined Staff Planners had stated that the over-all aim for operations in the Pacific was: "To obtain objectives from which we can conduct intensive air bombardment and establish a sea and air blockade

against Japan and from which to invade Japan proper if this should prove to be necessary."

It was significant that the Combined Planners had made the important assumption that an invasion of the principal Japanese islands might not be necessary because Japan might be defeated by sea and air blockade




and intensive air bombardment from progressively advanced bases. Yet plans had to be capable of expansion to meet the possible need for invasion.

The Combined Planners favoured the Central Pacific route because it promised (1) a more rapid advance toward Japan and her vital lines of communication; (2) the earlier acquisition of strategic air bases, closer

to the Japanese homeland; and (3)—of greatest importance—was more likely to precipitate a decisive engagement with the Japanese Fleet. However, they decided that large efforts would be made through both the Central Pacific and South-West Pacific Areas concurrently. Operations in Burma, the North Pacific, South Pacific and China were to support the main operations. Plans for these operations were adopted before Roosevelt, Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek with their chiefs of staff met at the Cairo conference.

The Australian High Commissioner in London, Mr Bruce, had informed Mr Curtin of the decisions by cablegram, and, in a letter of 23rd December, Mr Curtin told General MacArthur of them. He wrote: "For the defeat of Japan, the advance along the New Guinea-Netherlands East Indies-Philippines axis will proceed concurrently with the operations for the capture of the Mandated Islands, these two series of operations being mutually supporting. Active study of the overall plan for the defeat of Japan is to continue, but subject to final approval, the present conception is that the main British-United States effort will be made in the Pacific along these two lines."

The capture of Talasea in New Britain in March 1944 was the final act in the ELKTON offensive, but the planning of action to follow the ELKTON campaign had already been going on at MacArthur's Headquarters for twelve months. In February 1943, MacArthur's staff officers had outlined the first RENO plan, which had as its strategic aim the seizure of air and naval bases in the Philippine Islands, so as to cut Japan off from Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, whence the Japanese had been obtaining rubber, oil, tin, rice and other vital materials. "A glance at the map," the plan states, "shows that the Philippine Islands group lies athwart all routes from Japan to the economic area which is the source of her raw materials. Whoever controls the air and naval bases in the Philippine Islands, necessarily controls these routes. Accordingly, after the accomplishment of our present mission, our next most important objective in the South-West Pacific Area is to secure air and naval bases in the Philippine Islands from which the ocean routes from Japan to the source of her vital war material may be severed."

In May 1943, in a revised RENO plan (RENO IIA) MacArthur had proposed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff that on the termination of the ELKTON offensive, his forces should seize Rabaul, which could then be prepared as a major base for later operations along the north coast of New Guinea leading finally to the invasion of the Philippines. This plan had proposed also that Manus Island in the Admiralty group should be seized. Air support for this operation would be given from Cape Gloucester and Kavieng. After the landing at Manus, air forces would be based there for use in later operations against the Hollandia area. The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however, had ruled out the capture of Rabaul on the grounds that it would be costly and time-consuming, even though naval facilities, such as Rabaul possessed, were needed in the later operations along the New Guinea coast.

However, good anchorages and sites for air bases existed in both the Admiralty Islands and at Kavieng in New Ireland. MacArthur's revised plan, RENO IV of 30th January 1944, called therefore for the capture of both Kavieng and the Admiralty group. MacArthur pointed out that "establishment of light naval forces and air elements in these areas permits development of the necessary base facilities and at the same time isolates Rabaul from the north".

In the RENO IV plan, the major strategic aim, the reoccupation of the Philippines, was to be achieved in five major phases:

Phase 1: To begin 15th February 1944

Seize bases in the Bismarcks and to the north-west of the Vitiaz Strait area to isolate Rabaul and for support of subsequent operations to occupy the Geelvink Bay-Vogelkop area.

Phase 2: To begin 15th June 1944

Advance north-westward along the north coast of New Guinea accompanied by establishment of air forces in the Arafura Sea area for strategic bombing operations in the Netherlands East Indies, for support of subsequent operations to occupy the Geelvink Bay-Vogelkop area.

Phase 3: To begin 1st October 1944

Seize and establish in the Geelvink Bay-Vogelkop area the major bases required for subsequent operations to occupy Mindanao.

Phase 4: To begin 1st January 1945

Seize areas contiguous to western New Guinea required for flank protection and support of subsequent operations to occupy Mindanao.

Phase 5: To begin 1st March 1945

Occupy Mindanao and consolidate the southern Philippines in preparation for subsequent operations to sever Japanese communications with the Malaya-N.E.I. area.

The first phase of this plan had already been approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Quebec conference in August 1943. At the Cairo conference, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved the second and third phases; but by February 1944 no decision had been reached on the two final phases which would bring MacArthur to the Philippines.

Late in December 1943 it had become clear that the operations against Kavieng and the Admiralties, which MacArthur had decided to mount on 1st March 1944, could not begin on the planned date because the American Pacific Fleet which was required to support these landings would be engaged in support of the Central Pacific operations which were to receive initial priority. Halsey was of the opinion that in any case Kavieng should not be attacked but neutralised only, on the ground that its offensive value to the enemy was nearing zero and yet it would be costly to capture it. Halsey proposed that his command should attack Green Island to isolate Rabaul on the east as an intermediate operation. MacArthur had agreed to this but not to the abandonment of the Kavieng operation.

Because of the reduction of means caused by prior consideration being given to the Central Pacific operations, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had also suggested to MacArthur that the operations in the Aru-Kai-Tanimbar

islands in the Arafura Sea should be either abandoned or staggered with the Hollandia operations. In March the Joint Intelligence Committee reported that the Japanese were building up defences in depth in the western New Guinea-Halmahera areas and recommended that this area as well as the Arafura Sea area should be by-passed, neutralised and blockaded instead of being assaulted.

Although the Cairo conference had decided that the main effort against Japan was to be made in the Pacific in two series of mutually-supporting operations, one under MacArthur and the other under Nimitz, no specific major objective had been decided on. Early in 1944, however, the American Joint Chiefs of Staff decided that the Luzon-Formosa-China coast area would be the first major objective area in the war against Japan. This major strategic objective was to be gained during 1944 and early 1945 in order to support the Chinese war effort and to establish bases for the final assault on Japan. The relief of the Chinese from across the Pacific was considered more feasible than through Burma.

The Joint Chiefs informed Nimitz and MacArthur of this decision on 2nd March and told them that Pacific strategy was to be directed towards gaining this objective in the most expeditious manner possible. They had concluded also that the most feasible approach to this major strategic area was by way of the Marianas, Carolines, Palau and Mindanao.

Churchill had considered that the decisions of the Cairo conference on the over-all plan for the defeat of Japan had been only a basis for further study and preparation. He was anxious that early independent operations in the South-East Asia area should be undertaken by Britain because, in addition to aiding the Chinese and the American drive through the Pacific, they were politically desirable from a British point of view. But Churchill's views were not shared by his Chiefs of Staff who, while admitting that political benefits could be gained, considered that British forces were not adequate to undertake a major operation in this area without American aid, and the Americans had consistently refused to contribute to that area the help that would make amphibious operations possible because it would reduce their Pacific effort. The British Chiefs of Staff argued that a united effort of the British fleet and American forces in the Pacific was likely to enable assistance to be given China through south-east China sooner than by operations designed to reconquer Burma and open the Burma Road. Bruce reported to Curtin on 14th March that the situation at the time was delicate and might even cause serious difficulties between the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff "which would be catastrophic at the present stage of operations in Europe". However, since the Americans would not make the amphibious craft available, Churchill's strategy could not be given effect. The American view of the Burma operations was that they should perform only the secondary functions of dispersing enemy forces and achieving the maximum attrition. Bruce also informed Curtin that it was proposed that four divisions should be sent from the United Kingdom to Australia arriving about eight

months after Germany's defeat, and that the initial British contribution in the Pacific would be to send a fleet to the South-West Pacific.

Mainly because of inter-service rivalry between the American Navy and Army, the American Pacific forces had not achieved unity of command for the drive on Japan. In a memorandum to Marshall on 2nd February MacArthur strongly urged reconsideration of the decision that the main effort in the Pacific should be in two mutually-supporting series of operations instead of in one powerful thrust. MacArthur said that under the plan of campaign, the Pacific forces "will be employed in two weak thrusts which cannot attain the major strategic objective until several months later . . . all available ground, air and assault forces in the Pacific should be combined in a drive along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis, supported by the main fleet based at Manus (Admiralty Islands). The move to the Marianas would not attain a major objective, nor can it prepare for the assault against the major objective of the Philippines because it is impossible to secure land-based air support or to prepare a fleet base there."

MacArthur, though doubtful that unity of command could be achieved, hoped that it would at least be possible to achieve a single major offensive plan. He sent General Sutherland, his chief of staff, to Washington in February to urge combination, and Sutherland pointed out to the Joint Chiefs that this would not involve any restriction of the action of the Pacific Fleet, and the question of command need not be considered "because General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz would operate entirely by cooperation". However, Sutherland returned from Washington without a decision on this issue.

It was abundantly clear that the American Navy considered that the Pacific war was peculiarly an affair of navies, and it had endeavoured from time to time to secure greater allocations of means and concentration in the Pacific. In Europe the American Navy could play only a minor role, in partnership with the British Navy, but in the Pacific it could and was taking the major share of responsibility. Admiral King in his second war report wrote:

> The European war has turned into a vast land campaign, in which the role of the navies is to keep open the trans-Atlantic sea routes against an enemy whose naval strength appears to be broken except for his U-boat activities. In contrast, the Pacific war is still in the "crossing the ocean" phase . . . as a rough generalisation, the war in Europe is now predominantly an affair of armies, while the war in the Pacific is still predominantly naval.

There could be little hope that the American Navy would be happy to subordinate its dominant role to an army commander. The issue was settled when the American Joint Chiefs of Staff issued their order of 12th March 1944 which directed MacArthur to conduct operations along the New Guinea coast in preparation for the Palau landing and the assault on Mindanao, and directed Nimitz to aid this drive and at the same time occupy the southern Marianas where he was to establish very-long-

range bombing bases from which Superfortresses would bomb the Japanese home islands. These operations were preliminary to the offensive against the Luzon-Formosa-China coast area. The most feasible approach to this major objective, the Joint Chiefs decided, was by way of the Marianas-Carolines-Palau-Mindanao area; they considered that the control of the Marianas-Carolines-Palau area was essential to the "projection of our forces into the region first named and their subsequent effective employment therefrom".

CHAPTER 11

# THE ADMIRALTIES

HAVING secured the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General MacArthur made ready to complete the isolation of Rabaul by seizing Kavieng, the Admiralties and the Hansa Bay area in New Guinea. Admiral Halsey's South Pacific forces would seize Kavieng on 1st April and on the same day South-West Pacific forces would invade the Seeadler Harbour area in the Admiralties. Orders were issued for these operations on 13th February.

The Allies wanted the Admiralties not so much because they would help isolate Rabaul, but because they would serve as a substitute for Rabaul. Seeadler Harbour, fifteen miles long and four wide, was capable of sheltering large naval forces; and, on Los Negros, airfields could be built from which aircraft could reach out to Truk and Biak. General Kenney planned to use his entire bomber force in the New Guinea area in support of the Admiralty Islands operation. Squadrons of the Australian No. 9 Group during the campaign were to neutralise enemy air forces in central New Britain and be prepared to occupy Manus Island with three fighter squadrons. Kenney also directed that two Liberator squadrons of the No. 380 Bombardment Group in the Darwin area should go to Nadzab to aid in the bombing operations. North-Western Area was also directed to help by carrying out armed reconnaissances of Jefman Island, Halmahera, Noemfoor, Ambon and Babo to defeat enemy attempts to move aircraft or ships through those areas towards the Admiralties. This duty was to begin on 15th March and continue through D-day (1st April) to the 7th April.

The R.A.A.F's No. 73 Wing, then at Kiriwina, was chosen as the fighter wing to garrison the Admiralties for a period of ninety days, after which this duty would be taken over by South Pacific forces. No. 73 Wing was commanded by Wing Commander Steege and included Nos. 76, 77 and 79 Squadrons. In addition to these squadrons No. 49 Operational Base Unit, No. 27 Air Stores Park and No. 26 Medical Clearing Station would accompany the wing. It was also planned that R.A.A.F. signals and fighter-sector personnel should land soon after 1st April and have everything in readiness for the fighters to operate immediately they were called forward to Los Negros. A total R.A.A.F. strength of 2,775 would be moved.

Air Commodore Lukis had protested strongly to Air Force Headquarters in Melbourne and to General Kenney when squadrons of No. 9 Group were assigned to the Admiralty Islands operation, on the ground that there would be little work for the fighter squadrons to do there. Contact with the enemy air forces was unlikely. General Kenney and General Whitehead (deputy commander of the Fifth Air Force) pointed out that Manus Island was to be developed into a naval base and that it was essential

that it be given adequate fighter protection. They overruled Lukis' objections and preparations began immediately for the move of No. 73 Wing. It was important that the R.A.A.F. fighters should be established as quickly as possible in the Admiralties to provide fighter cover because fighters operating from New Guinea bases and Cape Gloucester would be too far away to remain long in the air over Manus.

Late in February, when it became clear to Kenney that the Japanese air forces were abandoning the Bismarck Archipelago he conceived the idea that a small force of troops could immediately seize and hold Los Negros Island. Kenney briskly relates how he put to MacArthur this proposal to move into the Admiralty Islands five weeks ahead of schedule and how the general had readily agreed:

> On the evening of the 23rd [February] the daily reconnaissance report indicated that the Jap might be withdrawing his troops from Los Negros back to Manus. There was nothing for him to stay for. . . .
>
> The message of the evening of the 24th confirmed my estimate. It said that the reconnaissance plane had flown at low altitude all over the island for half an hour. No one had fired a shot at it. There was still a heap of dirt in front of the Jap field hospital door that had been piled there two days before by the bombing. There had been no washing on the lines for three days. In short, Los Negros was ripe for the picking.
>
> I went upstairs to General MacArthur's office and proposed that we seize the place immediately with a few hundred troops and some engineers, who would quickly put the airdrome in shape so that if necessary we could reinforce the place by air. Kinkaid had a lot of destroyers at Milne Bay and we could use them for a fast express run as the Japs had done to us all through the Buna Campaign. We could load a couple of hundred of General Swift's crack 1st Cavalry Division on each destroyer, run up there during the night, and unload and seize the place at daybreak. I could have fighters overhead and bombers to knock out the Japs if they did try to stop us from stealing Los Negros from under their noses. If the weather should stop me from supporting the show, it would also prevent the Jap air force from interfering. We need not take any real chances. On arrival off the island, if the Nips did too much shooting, we could always call it an armed reconnaissance and back out. On the other hand, if we got ashore and could stick, we could forget all about Kavieng and maybe even Hansa Bay. Manus was the key spot controlling the whole Bismarck Sea.[1]

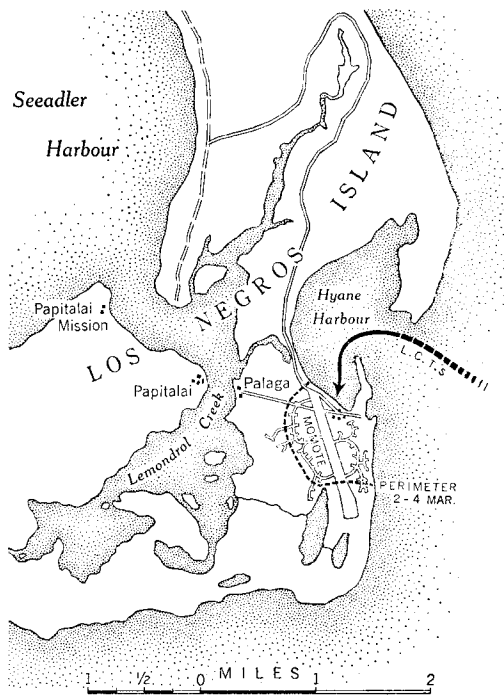
MacArthur agreed; but Kenney's hope that the enemy might be withdrawing from Los Negros was not realised. In fact Colonel Ezaki, the garrison commander, was fully aware of the coming invasion, he had prohibited all firing at Allied aircraft, and allowed no movement in the open until 5 p.m. each day to create the impression that the defending forces had gone. Allied scouts who arrived in a Catalina on the 27th February went ashore and found the place "lousy with Japs". The landing of this Catalina, according to a Japanese officer interrogated later, had been observed and the forces were ordered to prepare for immediate action. Japanese troops in the Admiralties numbered 2,615. General Imamura, anticipating the danger, had sent a battalion of the *38th Division* to the island in February to reinforce the garrison, the main force of which was stationed on Los Negros.

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[1] *General Kenney Reports*, pp. 358-9.

General Kenney's plan was given immediate effect although the sudden change gave little time for preparation. For example, the cruiser *Phoenix* which was to take part in the operation was in Brisbane on the 26th February, and the captain was told to be at Milne Bay on the 28th. Shore patrols from the ship raced round Brisbane, with blaring loud-speakers broadcasting the code word for recall to 300 sailors.

Before the landing on the 29th February cruisers and destroyers carried out a bombardment of shore targets, but because of the foul weather only nine aircraft from the ten squadrons of Liberators and Mitchells assigned to the operation got through to support the landing. However, units of the 1st Cavalry Division, commanded by General Swift, landed on the south-west shore of Hyane Harbour near the Momote airfield. There was little initial opposition and the airfield was quickly seized and defences set up. Six hours after the landing, General MacArthur, who had observed the operation from the *Phoenix,* went ashore. He walked up and down the airstrip, pacing its length and width and dug into the coral surfacing to test it "while his anguished aide, Colonel Lehrbas, tried to get him to hurry his investigations and get out of the range of occasional sniper fire that was beginning to develop. The General told Brigadier-General Chase to stay and hold the place."[2]




There was no air opposition to the landing, because, no doubt, of the heavy weather. No enemy aircraft appeared at all until 2nd March, when Allied fighters chased off more than forty of the enemy.

Meanwhile, Japanese troops had made determined counter-attacks both by day and by night, but were repulsed. Reinforcements, composed of the remainder of the 5th Regiment of the 1st Cavalry Division and supporting artillery units arrived on 2nd March. The same convoy brought Wing Commander Minchin,[3] who had been appointed Signals Liaison

[2] Kenney, p. 362.
[3] W Cdr W. A. Minchin. 270916. (1914-18: Wireless Branch RAN.) Area Sigs Offr Southern

Officer to coordinate signals services between the R.A.A.F. units engaged and the Sixth American Army. He was accompanied by a party of twelve R.A.A.F. men of No. 114 Fighter Sector, who were to set up the fighter-defence organisation.

A supreme effort was made by the enemy on the night of 3rd-4th March when they attacked in a series of waves, but were repulsed. To the astonishment of the American soldiers, one of the enemy attacks was preceded by the playing of a gramophone record *Deep in the Heart of Texas*! More American reinforcements arrived on the 4th, 6th and 9th March.

The ground party of No. 77 Squadron arrived in an L.S.T. on the morning of 6th March in a convoy that also brought American reinforcements. The party, comprising nine officers and 194 airmen under Flight Lieutenant Irwin,[4] had left Goodenough Island on 2nd March and Finschhafen on the 4th. The convoy had to enter Hyane Harbour through a small opening in the reef about 120 feet wide. As the ships entered, Japanese troops on a point opposite, about 300 yards off, fired on them with machine-guns and 25-mm cannon. The L.S.T.'s in the convoy returned the fire and destroyers also opened up on them. When the American reinforcements filed ashore from the L.S.T.'s they were marched to the front line about 200 yards along the beach. At this time the area held by the Americans comprised the airfield and a narrow area between the airfield and the sea. One of the first Australians off the L.S.T. asked a near-by American where the front line was. The American replied: "Boy, you're right in it!"[5]

The men of the R.A.A.F. set to work unloading 600 tons of squadron equipment, while American Mitchell bombers carried out a bombing and strafing attack on enemy positions only 300 yards away. At nightfall they dug foxholes along the fringe of the beach and from these kept watch for enemy infiltration. Small parties of the enemy came forward during the night, but none reached the air force positions. Some days later aided by American engineers the Australians began to hack a site for their camp out of the jungle.

Meanwhile, at Kiriwina, the pilots of No. 76 Squadron stood by their machines ready for the order to fly to Momote as soon as the airfield there was ready to receive them. General Kenney had directed that the R.A.A.F. fighters should arrive between D-plus-five days (4th March) and D-plus-ten (9th March). The aircraft of No. 76 were to travel from Kiriwina to Finschhafen and then on to Momote. On arrival at Momote half the squadron was to land, refuel and be brought to "stand-by" as quickly as possible while the other half patrolled overhead. When the

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Area 1941-42; Chief Commn Offr North-Eastern Area 1942-43; comd 10 Sigs Unit 1943; Chief Sigs Offr 9 Gp and Northern Cd 1943-44; RAAF Sigs LO Fifth Air Force and 10 Gp 1944; Chief Sigs Offr Southern Area 1945. Radio engineer; of Rockhampton, Qld; b. Warracknabeal, Vic, 15 May 1896.

[4] F-Lt L. Irwin, 274540. 77 Sqn, 83 Wing. Journalist; of Warwick, Qld; b. Warwick, 24 Feb 1914.

[5] Gordon Powell, *Two Steps to Tokyo* (1945), p. 166.

first half had been brought to stand-by the remainder would land, refuel and also come to stand-by.

The advanced ground party of No. 76 which was to go to Momote ahead of the flying echelon of the squadron, was directed by No. 9 Group to move on 4th March. The order for the movement of this advanced party had come unexpectedly at Kiriwina and men of the whole squadron had worked feverishly for eighteen hours to prepare the party and its equipment for this emergency move. However it could not take place on 4th March because at that date American engineers preparing the airfield for use were still being fired on by Japanese snipers and the airfield was not ready for operations. Advanced headquarters of the Fifth Air Force therefore signalled No. 9 Group informing Lukis that the "tactical situation . . . prohibits troop carrier operation at this time". Since ground crews of No. 76 could not be moved to Momote, the ground crews of No. 77 Squadron, who would arrive on 6th March, were directed to take over the handling of No. 76's aircraft.

By 7th March, the American engineers had 3,500 feet of the Momote airfield ready, and that afternoon the first Allied aircraft to reach the island—an American Mitchell—landed. On the same day, twenty-three Kittyhawks of No. 76, whose pilots included Wing Commander Steege, commander of the wing, and Squadron Leader Loudon,[6] commander of No. 76, left Kiriwina for Finschhafen. After twenty-four hours delay at Finschhafen, twelve of these aircraft were called forward to Momote. They were guided to the island by a Mitchell and landed at Momote on the afternoon of 9th March. Steege found that because of Japanese night activity no tents had been put up, and the R.A.A.F. men on the island were living under the most primitive conditions, including sleeping at night in damp, unhygienic dugouts. Unburied Japanese dead lay around the airfield bringing swarms of flies. The pilots had to spend the first night in the open in drizzling rain. Sleep was disturbed by the constant fusillade of small arms fire at shadows and movement.

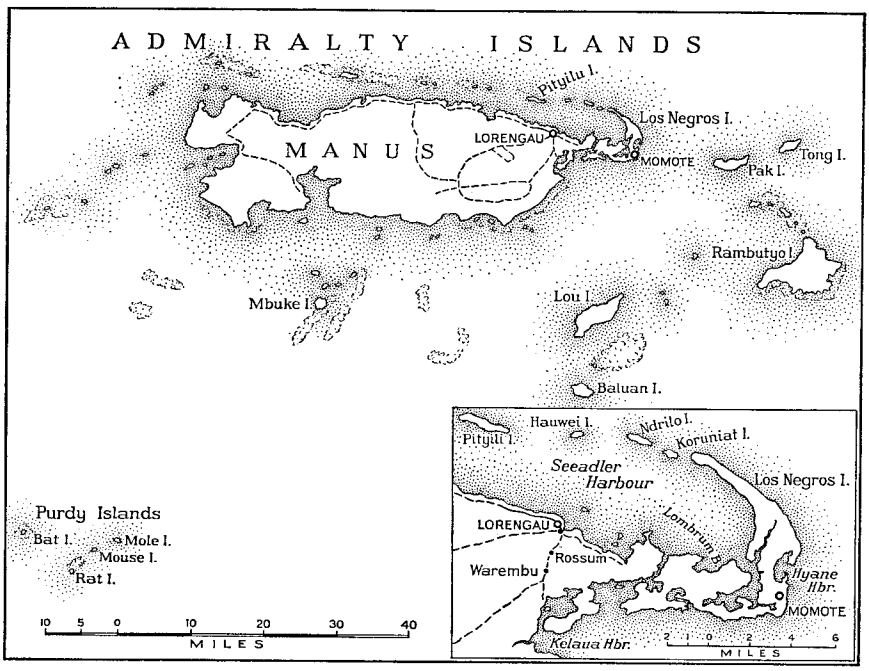
The twelve Kittyhawks came to readiness immediately they arrived on 9th March and the remaining twelve aircraft of No. 76 arrived at midday on the 10th. One of these crashed on landing but the pilot escaped injury. There were a number of ships standing off shore and the naval commander asked Steege to provide Kittyhawks for patrols to counter possible enemy air attacks. A standing patrol was provided from dawn until dusk on 10th March. On this day two Kittyhawks were ordered off the ground to attempt the interception of an enemy plane reported by radar south of Los Negros, but they failed to find the enemy aircraft and were recalled to base. Before landing they made a general search of the area but found no signs of enemy activity.

Fifth Air Force Fighter Command, on 11th March, directed No. 73 Wing to provide fighter cover for a squadron of Mitchell bombers which were to bomb Lorengau airfield on Manus. Twelve Kittyhawks of No. 76

[6] Sqn Ldr I. S. Loudon, DFC, 404691. 603 Sqn RAF; comd 76 Sqn 1943-44. Rubber planter; of Port Moresby, Papua; b. Port Moresby, 17 Oct 1921.

led by Loudon took off at 10 a.m. and carried out this duty without meeting interference from the enemy. The same day reports arrived of the approach of an enemy naval force, and all available Kittyhawks were armed with 500-lb bombs to attack it. However, further searches failed to find this force and it was considered that low-lying islands to the north of Manus had been mistaken for enemy naval vessels.

About 10 p.m. on the night of the 11th March Japanese aircraft dropped four bombs on the runway of Momote airfield. They damaged four of the Kittyhawks, but the ground crews repaired these aircraft during the night and all were ready for flying early next morning.




An American patrol had been sent to reconnoitre Hauwei Island on 11th March to find suitable advanced artillery positions for support of a landing on Manus Island. This patrol had been badly mauled by the enemy, and next day the American commander called for artillery, air and naval support while a larger force landed. No. 76 provided six Kittyhawks which bombed and strafed the western tip of the island. Four of their 500-lb bombs fell on the target area and two landed in the sea fifty yards south of it. The landing by a squadron of the 7th Cavalry was successful although they met stern resistance from the enemy. The occupation was completed the following day.

No. 76 Squadron gave support to a larger operation on 15th March when units of the cavalry division embarked in transports in Hyane Har-

bour with the object of seizing the Lorengau airfield. Supported by fire from six destroyers, artillery fire and bombing attacks by Mitchells, the troops went ashore at dawn. Early in the afternoon No. 76 was ordered to bomb a position 800 yards west of the Lorengau airfield and marked for them by a white cross and smoke. The primary position was hit by four of the 500-lb bombs. The squadron made a second attack later in the afternoon. By nightfall the Americans were near Lorengau airfield, which was captured on 17th March; next day Lorengau village was taken.

Meanwhile R.A.A.F. reinforcements had arrived at Los Negros. On 13th March fourteen Kittyhawks of No. 77 led by Squadron Leader Stark had left Vivigani and they arrived at Momote that afternoon. Before landing they patrolled over the airfield while twenty Douglas transports which brought the long-delayed advanced party of No. 76 unloaded and dispersed. Ground crews of No. 76 immediately took over the care of the squadron's twenty-three Kittyhawks. Next day No. 77 again carried out shipping patrols and on 16th March six aircraft were loaded with 500-lb bombs and told to attack ground positions in support of the cavalrymen on Manus Island. All bombs dropped within the target area. On the afternoon of the same day Squadron Leader Stark led another six of his Kittyhawks in a bombing and strafing attack on a village in the south-western corner of Los Negros Island. They bombed red-roofed dwellings in the village and repeatedly strafed it with machine-gun fire. Later observation showed that some twenty huts were burned out as a result of the attack.

The stock of bombs was now depleted, and Steege signalled for another fifty 500-lb bombs. Five air transports were used to bring these in. When they arrived it was learned that equipment and personnel of No. 76 had been unloaded at Dobodura to provide transport for the bombs. This left the squadron still short of essential men and equipment and caused serious problems of maintenance.

On this day there was a considerable increase in R.A.A.F. strength when the transport *Marcus Daly* arrived from Kiriwina with 897 men. Units on the *Marcus Daly* included No. 73 Wing Headquarters, No. 114 Mobile Fighter Sector, No. 14 Wireless Telegraphy Station, No. 10 Signals Unit installation party, No. 26 Medical Clearing Station, No. 27 Air Stores Park, No. 79 Squadron ground party (207 men) and detachments of service police, a malaria-control unit, a bomb-disposal squad, and No. 4 Replenishing Centre. Because of limited space aboard the ship it was found impossible to embark No. 12 Repair and Salvage Unit which had 360 men on its strength. At Milne Bay, some 200 more men were embarked, together with a quantity of deck cargo, and this severely cramped accommodation. Meal parades were a never-ending procession from one end of the ship to the other. When they arrived off Los Negros the men were allowed to take only their personal gear ashore, which meant that they had to spend several nights without cover. Flies were present in swarms and, as it was impossible to prevent them coming into contact with food, the number of cases of enteritis increased. At times

20 per cent of the ground crews suffered from malaria, dengue or dysentery. Very sick cases were admitted to the American 58th Evacuation Hospital.

With two squadrons now established at Momote No. 73 Wing was able to assume the duty of providing cover for shipping that moved in and out of Seeadler Harbour. General Whitehead on 16th March ordered the wing to take over responsibility for all shipping north of latitude 3 degrees 37 minutes south, whether north or south bound, or while at anchorage. This became the main function of the wing. On 17th March No. 77 provided this cover all day; four Kittyhawks remained aloft at a time, maintaining the patrol for three hours each flight. The two Kittyhawk squadrons shared this responsibility on alternate days. Despite the fact that these constant patrols involved a great deal of flying, and despite the difficult conditions, No. 76 maintained an average daily serviceability of twenty-one aircraft, an achievement which reflected great credit on the ground crews.

To give early warning of the approach of enemy aircraft five R.A.A.F. radar stations, Nos. 337, 340, 345, 346 and 347, were assigned to the Admiralty Islands. Nos. 337 and 347 arrived at Los Negros on 9th March and began immediately to instal their equipment. No. 340 Station was sent to Bat Island, one of the four tiny islands of the Purdy group south of the Admiralties. This radar station arrived at Bat Island on 11th March and within three days was operating. However, conditions at Bat Island were found to be most unhealthy. The island, only 450 yards long and 300 yards wide, was excellent as a site for a radar station, except that it was the filthy home of seagulls, thousands of rats, and hundreds of wild pigs. Ten days after the station began operating a man became ill from scrub typhus and, from then on, nineteen more R.A.A.F. men went down with typhus and dengue. Two of them died. Four out of six Americans who were on the island died from typhus.

Because of the outbreak of scrub typhus orders were issued early in April for the station to be withdrawn from Bat Island. It ceased operations on 13th April. While it operated, the station kept tracks of Allied aircraft and gave warning of a few enemy aircraft detected by its instruments.

The success of the daring move into the Admiralty Islands, and the withdrawal of the enemy air units from Rabaul and the fleet from Truk presented General MacArthur with a chance to move his men rapidly forward. Admiral Halsey flew to Brisbane early in March to discuss the situation with him, and on 3rd March MacArthur suggested to Halsey that he should assault Kavieng on 15th March instead of 1st April. Halsey said that it could not be done, but offered to move into Emirau instead of Kavieng by that date. MacArthur, however, wanted Kavieng to be taken. There was general agreement that Hansa Bay should be by-passed in favour of Hollandia. The Hollandia operation would also be aided by a preliminary operation to seize Aitape for an advanced fighter base to cover the troops as they landed at Hollandia farther west.

MacArthur radioed the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5th March, informing them that the enemy was massing ground forces forward in the Madang-Wewak area, leaving relatively weak forces at Hollandia. He therefore proposed to seize Hollandia and by-pass Hansa Bay. This operation, he said, "would hopelessly isolate some 40,000 enemy ground forces along the New Guinea coast and hasten the advance westwards by several months".

The Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed, and Hollandia was substituted for Hansa Bay, the target date being 15th April. To MacArthur's surprise the Joint Chiefs also cancelled the Kavieng operation and directed him to complete the isolation of the Rabaul-Kavieng zone "with the minimum commitment of forces". He was also to speed up the complete occupation of the Admiralties, which was to be developed as a fleet and air base, and to establish air forces there to complete the neutralisation of Rabaul and Kavieng, and assist in the neutralisation of Truk.

MacArthur therefore on 16th March cancelled the Kavieng operation and directed Halsey to occupy Emirau Island where he was to establish air and light naval forces which were to blockade the Rabaul area. Halsey's landing force left Guadalcanal on 18th March and occupied Emirau on the 20th. It sailed through waters which a few months earlier had been controlled by the Japanese, but no enemy plane, surface ship, or submarine attempted to interfere. Admiral Halsey reported: "The island was ours at the price of one casualty: a Seabee fell off a bulldozer and broke his leg."[7]

After the fall of Lorengau airfield on Manus Island the 1st Cavalry Division pushed south across the island. Though their main task was the protection of shipping the Kittyhawk squadrons continued to support the infantry in the task of destroying the remaining Japanese forces. On 21st March Kittyhawks of No. 77 bombed and strafed a target indicated by the infantry by smoke bombs. Led by Stark, they continued to Pityilu Island north of Manus where they machine-gunned houses and native huts.

No. 77 attacked again on 23rd March at Warembu village and the following day bombed and strafed Rossum, a Japanese strong-point on Manus Island. Twelve Kittyhawks took part in this mission and all bombs fell in the target area. One machine piloted by Pilot Officer O'Reilly[8] hit palms at the southern end of the Momote airfield when it was coming in to land after the mission. The Kittyhawk crashed and immediately caught fire, O'Reilly being fatally injured.

Steege and Loudon had observed the bombing at Rossum from the ground on 24th March. The Americans were to launch a final assault on this strong-point next day, and Steege arranged with Brigadier-General

[7] W. F. Halsey: *Admiral Halsey's Story*, p. 184. A "Seabee" i.e. CB, a member of a Naval Construction Battalion.

[8] P-O E. N. O'Reilly, 432559; 77 Sqn. Student; of Pymble, NSW; b. North Sydney, 19 Dec 1922. Died of injuries 24 Mar 1944. A brother, F-O T. B. O'Reilly, also a fighter pilot, was killed over UK 12 Jun 1943.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Closely coordinated ground-air wireless liaison achieved this successful strafing attack on a Japanese Topsy aircraft at Selaru Island on 22nd July 1944. The message from the enemy pilot over his base saying he was about to land, was intercepted by an Australian W/T station, and relayed to three Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron which were in the vicinity and headed for the Japanese strip. After having waited until the Topsy had landed they delivered surprise attacks on the enemy aircraft and destroyed it.



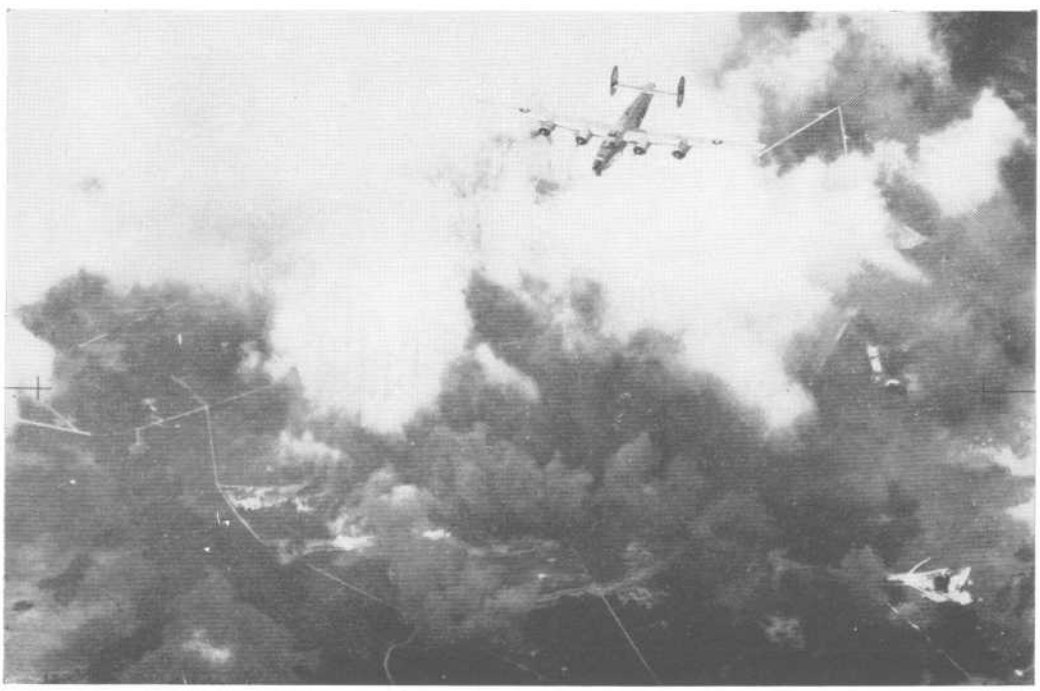
*(R.A.A.F.)*

Mitchells of No. 18 (Netherlands) Squadron on an airfield in North-Western Area in July 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A "Sugar Charlie" (300-1,000 ton sea trucks used by the Japanese for inter-island transport) is left burning and listing off the tip of Alor Island, north-west of Timor, on 21st August 1944, after being bombed and strafed by three Mitchells of No. 2 Squadron, piloted by F-Os E. L. Ekert and K. E. Coughlan, and F-Sgt P. Hocking.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A Liberator of No. 24 Squadron over Ambesia airstrip, Celebes, on 24th October 1944.

Mudge, commander of the 2nd Brigade of the 1st Cavalry Division, to give extensive close-support bombing. The position of the American troops was to be marked by white smoke and the Kittyhawks were to bomb 500 yards in front of the smoke and parallel to it. At the conference it was also arranged that Flying Officer Hannagan,[9] the operations officer of No. 76, should be stationed with the forward troops to control the Kittyhawks by radio. No. 77 attacked with ten Kittyhawks at 8 a.m. next day, all their bombs dropping in the target area indicated to them. These aircraft returned to Momote, reloaded and, all except one which had become unserviceable, again bombed and then machine-gunned the target. Loudon led thirteen more Kittyhawks of No. 76 against the same target. The American forces then attacked Rossum and seized it. This was the end of organised resistance by the Japanese on Manus.

There had been considerable delay in calling forward the Spitfires of No. 79 because of the difficulties met by the ground party in establishing a camp area for them on Los Negros. They were finally summoned on 28th March and flew from Kiriwina direct to Momote. On the same day ten additional Kittyhawks of No. 77 arrived at Los Negros from Finschhafen.

The experience at Los Negros had shown that R.A.A.F. units were not organised to cope with rapid movement. The men did not have enough handling gear to load their equipment; there was a lack of transit cases and crating timber; and the men of the units lacked experience of unloading vessels. As a result great damage was done to equipment during unloading, and this caused delay in setting up camps and operating facilities. Even so, after the cargo was taken off the ships the squadrons were soon operating efficiently. On 28th March the condition of each squadron of No. 73 Wing was:

No. 76 Squadron: Twenty-three aircraft which were being serviced by the advanced flight of about half the squadron; the remainder of the squadron was still at Goodenough with heavy equipment awaiting transport to the Admiralties.

No. 77 Squadron: Twenty-four aircraft operating, and a small rear party of about forty men remaining at Goodenough.

No. 79 Squadron: Twenty-four aircraft in operation with a small rear ground party still at Kiriwina.

As soon as they arrived, the Spitfires joined the other two squadrons in attacks on Pityilu Island where the enemy maintained their last defences threatening the security of Seeadler Harbour. The 1st Cavalry Division was to land there on 30th March and on the 29th the R.A.A.F. wing was to bombard and strafe the island. Heavy rain had put the airfield out of use on the morning of 29th March, but by midday it was fit for operations again. No. 76 flew twenty-four bombing and strafing sorties in the afternoon. The Spitfires of No. 79, led by Squadron Leader Bott[1] also machine-gunned targets on the island which were presumed to be the enemy head-

[9] F-Lt J. L. Hannagan, 415141. 76 and 25 Sqns. Stockman; of Northam, WA; b. Northam, 29 Mar 1912.

[1] Sqn Ldr M. S. Bott, 260779. 21 and 76 Sqns, comd 79 Sqn 1943-44. Clerk; of Manly, NSW; b. Brisbane, 16 Apr 1914. Killed in action 16 Apr 1944.

quarters. Six of their bombs fell on the targets. The air assault on Pityilu continued early next morning when Nos. 76 and 79 attacked again, bombing and strafing a beach before the landing of troops. The Americans landed successfully and by 31st March had crushed enemy resistance.[2]

During their operations in support of the American ground forces in the Admiralties the R.A.A.F. aircraft were bombing targets indicated to them by signals or by map references. In very few instances could the pilots actually see evidence of enemy activity and on most occasions were unable to report whether or not their attacks had been successful. The squadron records of the period give very little information on this phase of R.A.A.F. operations. However, the constant bombing and machine-gunning undoubtedly had a moral effect on the enemy ground forces as well as destroying positions and killing Japanese soldiers.

Early in April minor operations against Koruniat, Ndrilo, Rambutyo and Pak Islands were carried out by the Americans supported by the R.A.A.F. squadrons. In addition, the Australian aircraft continued to give daily cover for shipping in the area. The protection of shipping and defence of the Admiralties against possible enemy air attacks became the only function of the wing, but not one engagement took place in the air between an R.A.A.F. and a Japanese aircraft during the whole of the Admiralties campaign, indicating how completely Japanese air power had been defeated in the New Guinea-New Britain area. "Allied air supremacy from this point on was complete and unchallenged."[3]

Without aircraft and naval vessels the Japanese base of Rabaul had no offensive power. The Allied landings in the Admiralties and Emirau completed the ring of bases which surrounded it, tightening the blockade. In addition to the destruction of air and naval power at Rabaul, Allied air attacks inflicted many casualties and damaged defences and installations.[4] The Japanese expected that the Allied air attacks on Rabaul would increase in strength, and therefore, late in 1943, they began to build a system of underground tunnels. The work went on apace and by March 1944 most of the Japanese installations were underground. The Japanese had sufficient stocks of food and supplies at Rabaul to last them a considerable time. This was fortunate for them because except for small

[2] F-Lt R. Taylor (Tenterfield, NSW) and F-O H. Belcher (Campsie, NSW) who commanded RAAF Bomb Disposal parties in the Admiralty Is took an RAAF party comprising Cpl L. F. Reeves (St Kilda, Vic), LAC's G. A. Germain (Alphington, Vic), T. K. Neal (Chatham via Taree, NSW), G. A. Marven (Albert Park, Vic) and H. Messenger (Coolgardie, WA), into the invasion of Pityilu. The party went in with the troops in their initial assault and although there was little opposition to the actual landing, the fighting later became severe. The party dealt mainly with unexploded bombs which had been dropped prior to the landing. Earlier in the campaign these parties had moved ahead of the infantry and mechanised forces detecting mines with plate mine detectors. The parties were constantly under fire and two Americans working with them were killed and one RAAF airman, LAC H. J. Pares (Solomontown, SA) wounded by shrapnel. The Americans awarded a Silver Star to F-Lt Taylor and Bronze Stars to Cpl A. F. Nixon (Ascot Vale, Vic) and to LAC's Pares, Moore and E. Morrison (Punchbowl, NSW). F-O Belcher was seriously injured in May 1944, when an explosive missile, which he and two members of his party were examining, exploded. Sgt N. Horn (Maroubra, NSW) was blinded by the explosion and LAC Messenger badly injured.

[3] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, p. 24.

[4] Of about 10,000 deaths among the Japanese garrison at Rabaul during the whole period of the war, at least 4,700 were a result of Allied aerial bombardment and naval gun fire. The greatest number of deaths occurred in the ten-month period Oct 1943-Jul 1944. In Nov and Dec 1943, 907 persons met their deaths as a result of the Allied air attacks (U.S. Bombing Survey. *Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, p. 26).

craft no vessel reached it with supplies after April 1944. The last vessel to get through was a cargo-carrying submarine which docked in April 1944.

The isolation of Rabaul by March 1944 was an important victory. By blockading Rabaul, the Allies prevented a garrison of about 80,000 highly-trained Japanese from taking an active part in the war. In their efforts, which continued until early in 1944, to maintain Rabaul as an offensive base and as a supply point for outlying bases, the Japanese lost 820 aircraft, 30 surface naval vessels, 154 large cargo ships, 517 barges and 4 submarines in Rabaul waters. Air losses had an important bearing on later naval engagements. An invasion of Rabaul by the Allies was unnecessary because it was effectively blockaded and neutralised by continued air bombardment. The passing of Rabaul's power gave great freedom of action to MacArthur's forces which, after the Admiralties campaign, were ordered to move rapidly forward towards the Philippines.

"*Rabaul delenda est* was the one essential condition of General MacArthur's advance along the New Guinea-Mindanao axis," wrote Professor Morison, the American naval historian. Yet this fortress had been neutralised without the firing of a single rifle by the infantry.

CHAPTER 12

# No. 10 GROUP AT NADZAB

THE success of the Allied campaign in the South-West Pacific in 1943 and the prospect of greater successes in 1944 pointed to the urgent need for reorganisation of the R.A.A.F. in New Guinea. It needed greater mobility. A new R.A.A.F. formation, or "air task force", was required which could move forward in jumps of 400-500 miles or more, fight the enemy, move rapidly forward and fight again, as General MacArthur's forces pressed on towards the Philippine Islands along the north New Guinea coast.

The war in the Pacific had entered a new phase. The enemy's outer defences were crumbling. Strong ground forces remained, but it was not MacArthur's intention to engage all of them. Having gained the approval of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he intended to move round certain heavily defended points—notably Wewak—in a series of advances which would gain him entry to the Philippines late in 1944.

The two R.A.A.F. organisations which controlled nearly all the experienced squadrons in contact with the enemy were North-Western Area and No. 9 Group. At the end of 1943 the North-Western Area force was committed to the dual task of defending northern Australia and aiding New Guinea operations by attacking the Japanese rear and flank. Earlier the R.A.A.F. had intended that No. 9 Group should be a mobile force capable of rapid movement, but in fact it was not. It had become a standard area force, similar to those of other R.A.A.F. areas on the mainland, and its mobility was limited. Air Vice-Marshal Bostock proposed that its name be changed to "Northern Area" so that its function would be better understood.

In September 1943 General Kenney asked Bostock to provide him with a mobile Australian force. By that time the R.A.A.F. had received more than 100 Vultee Vengeance dive bombers. It was therefore decided that the new force would consist of a dive bomber wing and a fighter wing, with their servicing and other necessary units. The fighters would protect the dive bombers during their attack missions. The group was to be ready for action at the end of 1943, and would probably be assigned to the New Britain area.[1]

As Bostock pointed out in a letter to Air Force Headquarters, the essential features of this proposed new group were "compactness, high mobility and clean-cut channels of command from top to bottom". The commander of the group was to have the rank of group captain and the

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[1] General MacArthur radioed to General Krueger on 7th November: "Because of anticipated decrease in long range pursuit aviation replacements, Air Force plans to station three RAAF short range pursuit squadrons and three RAAF dive bomber squadrons at [Lindenhafen, New Britain]. There is under consideration a proposal to move the 6th and 7th RAAF Mobile Construction units from [Goodenough] and [Kiriwina] to [New Britain] in order to increase the engineering force available." The purpose of the Lindenhafen force was to give added security to Vitiaz Strait.

wings were to be commanded by senior wing commanders. In order to "streamline" the wings and keep them down to a minimum of men and equipment, they were to be free of all services such as legal, hygiene, chaplains, provost, dental, pay and equipment. Both Bostock and Group Captain Packer, who commanded Forward Echelon,[2] emphasised to Air Force Headquarters that in planning the group they should concentrate on the fact that this was the "last chance to keep the R.A.A.F. always up with the advance towards Japan". This, they said, must be the prime consideration upon which planning should be based.

On 13th November Air Force Headquarters issued orders creating the new formation, which was to be known as No. 10 (Operational) Group. It was assigned as a subordinate force within No. 9 (Operational) Group. The units placed under the new group were:

*No. 10 (Operational) Group Headquarters* (Group Captain Scherger)
- No. 13 Signals Unit.
- No. 25 Stores Unit.
- No. 11 R.A.A.F. Postal Unit.
- No. 10 Replenishing Centre.
- No. 7 Transport and Movements Office.
- No. 2 Malaria Control Unit.

*No. 77 Wing Headquarters* (Wing Commander Fyfe)
- No. 21 Dive Bomber Squadron.
- No. 23 Dive Bomber Squadron.
- No. 24 Dive Bomber Squadron.
- No. 47 Operational Base Unit.
- No. 11 Repair and Salvage Unit.
- No. 23 Medical Clearing Station.

*No. 78 Wing Headquarters* (Wing Commander Brookes)
- No. 80 Fighter Squadron.
- No. 452 Fighter Squadron.
- No. 457 Fighter Squadron.
- No. 111 Fighter Sector Headquarters.
- No. 48 Operational Base Unit.
- No. 22 Repair and Salvage Unit.
- No. 24 Medical Clearing Station.

Some of these units were not yet in existence and had to be formed and ready for movement by 1st December. Shipping was asked for to transport the group from Brisbane on 1st December. Preparing the group within five weeks posed a difficult problem and in spite of great efforts the departure from Australia had to be postponed until 1st January 1944. This delay resulted in confusion in shipping arrangements. The difficulties caused by the rapid concentration of the units near Brisbane is well illustrated by the experience of No. 11 Repair and Salvage Unit (commanded by Squadron Leader Taylor[3]). The unit's historical record reported:

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[2] Forward Echelon was an organisation representing Air Force Headquarters at MacArthur's headquarters.

[3] W Cdr C. R. Taylor, 2408. Comd 11 RSU 1943-45. Regular airman; of East Kew, Vic; b. East Melbourne, 20 Feb 1913.

Arrangements for receiving and storage of the unit equipment at Meeandah were totally inadequate. This equipment, approximately 2,000 ship tons, was dumped in an open paddock sodden with recent rainfall and without any cover whatsoever. The camping facilities for our off loading party were a disgrace, filthy beyond description. The officer in charge of the party refused to house his troops there, necessitating their being conveyed to and from Sandgate, Queensland, each day. The unit quickly settled down at Coominya, where there was only one building which housed headquarters. Prior to arriving at this out of the way spot, we were advised that water for drinking and washing could be drawn from two dams located on the spot. This water proved to be useless, cattle being allowed to use the same for drinking; however we were able to locate an excellent well between Coominya and Lowood.

No. 21 Squadron experienced similar difficulties. There was no suitable site for a camp at Lowood and the whole of the squadron's equipment was dumped in a creek bed. After a few days, rain fell heavily, the creek overflowed and washed out the squadron's camp, ruining most of the equipment, which eventually had to be replaced. The Vengeance aircraft could not be kept serviceable for long in these chaotic conditions, with the result that the crews obtained very little practice before flying to New Guinea.

Of the six squadrons of the new group, No. 24 was already in the New Guinea area (Kiriwina) and No. 80 was at Townsville, Queensland. Nos. 452 and 457 were to move from the Northern Territory when relieved by two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons (Nos. 548 and 549) which were leaving the United Kingdom during November for Australia. Nos. 21 and 23 Squadrons had to be ready to move from Lowood on 1st December.

Before the work of organisation had gone far ahead, it became clear that the two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons which were to relieve Nos. 452 and 457 would not arrive from Britain in time. Kenney was anxious to have the group in action and directed that No. 75 Squadron which was at Goodenough and No. 78 at Kiriwina should be substituted. All the fighter squadrons would now be equipped with Kittyhawk aircraft and this would greatly simplify the supply and maintenance problems of the group.

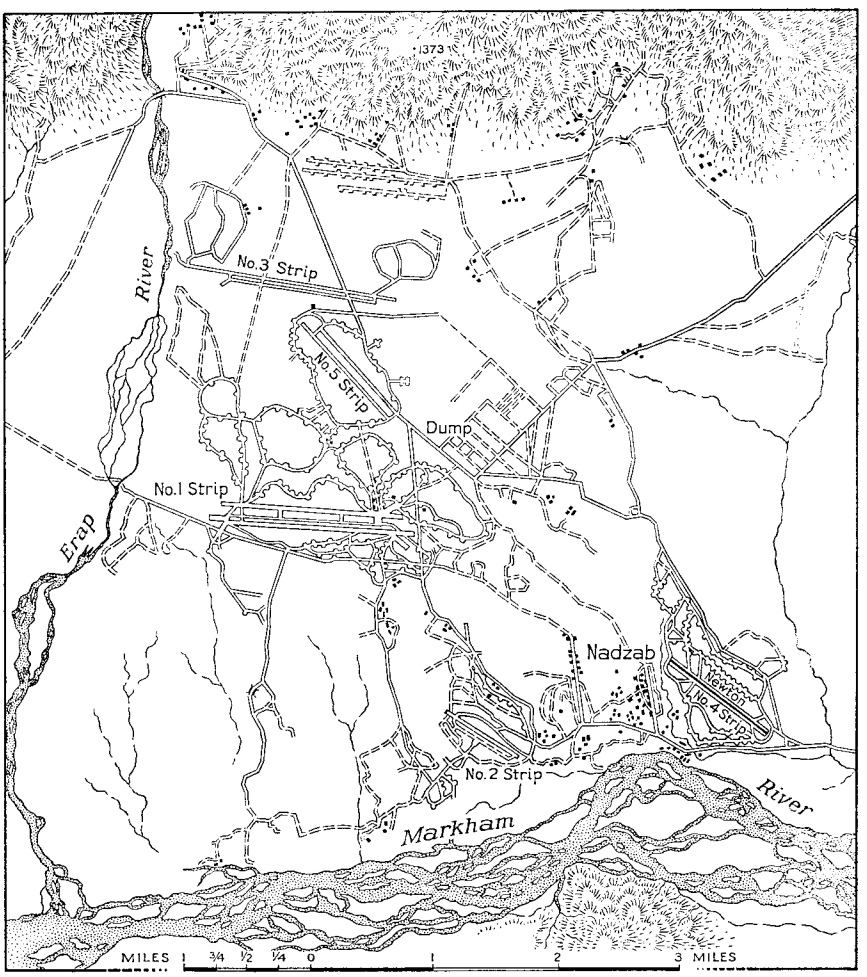
One of the last persons to be appointed to the group was the commander himself, Group Captain Scherger. Mr Curtin, in his capacity as Minister for Defence, approved of Scherger's appointment on 24th November. It was a mistake to delay the appointment of the commander until the organisation of his command was so far advanced that he was given no say in the selection of the staff with whom he was to work. However, Scherger got on well with the members of his staff, and they with one another. Group Captain Pearce was appointed senior air staff officer, Wing Commander Wight,[4] senior administrative officer and Wing Commander Hammond,[5] group equipment officer. Bostock impressed on Scherger the importance of good relations with the Americans and the

[4] Gp Capt F. J. B. Wight, 30. Comd 1 EFTS 1939-40, 59 Sqn RAF 1941, 3 SFTS 1942, 8 SFTS 1942-43; SAO 10 Gp 1943-44. Regular air force offr; of Maryborough, Vic; b. 3 Aug 1905. Killed in aircraft accident 30 Jan 1944.

[5] W Cdr W. L. Hammond, 1075; 10 Gp. Regular air force offr; of King's Park, SA; b. Adelaide, 9 Sep 1914. Killed in aircraft accident 30 Jan 1944.

need to ensure that by its efficiency in battle the group would earn a worthy place in the campaigns then contemplated.

General Kenney had planned to use No. 10 Group as a self-contained force to occupy an airfield in the Gasmata area on the southern coast of New Britain. It would have assisted No. 9 Group, which already had the responsibility of attacking and neutralising the Japanese in central New Britain. However, the Gasmata operation had been abandoned.




Early in December Scherger flew to Port Moresby to arrange the movement of his group to the battle area, and there he conferred with Brigadier-General Whitehead, the deputy commander of the Fifth Air Force. It was agreed between them that No. 10 Group would support the Fifth Air

Force in the Huon Gulf area and that the whole group would move into Nadzab and operate from No. 4 Airfield. In addition, the R.A.A.F's No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which had been supporting the Australian ground forces throughout the Huon Gulf campaign, would be put under No. 10 Group's control. At Nadzab, Wing Commander Dale,[6] the commander of No. 62 Airfield Construction Wing, which was busily engaged in construction work, informed Scherger that the No. 4 Airfield would be ready to take aircraft by 15th January, with sufficient dispersals for two squadrons. To speed up construction work, Scherger ordered carpenters, plumbers, general hands and labourers of his group to fly there as soon as possible. They left late in December and became the advance guard of the group.

In January the major units of the group began their movement forward by air and by sea from their island bases, or from the mainland. Amid brisk activity, parties on the mainland began embarking at Brisbane and Townsville. The Headquarters of No. 10 Group and main parties of Nos. 21 and 23 Squadrons boarded *Van der Lijn* at Brisbane, while at Townsville another 791 officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the group embarked in *Edward C. Baker.*

Meanwhile, the R.A.A.F. works squadrons which had been in the Lae-Nadzab area since early in December had completed the construction of No. 4 Airfield. This airfield was later named Newton Field after Flight Lieutenant Newton of No. 22 Squadron who had won the Victoria Cross for gallantry in this area. The construction squadrons building the urgently needed runways, roads and camps at Nadzab were Nos. 2, 6 and 7; No. 6 making taxiways and surfaced dispersal areas for aircraft, while Nos. 2 and 7 worked on the twin 6,000-foot runways. They cleared, graded and rolled the two strips, and finally surfaced them with gravel and bound them with bitumen. Altogether some 1,400 men were engaged in this work, aided by the advance parties of No. 10 Group units, which were moving in during the month. The work of these men was interrupted by occasional enemy air attacks, but no serious damage resulted and they completed their work ahead of the time set.

On 11th January two Kittyhawks landed on one runway at Newton Field, and on the following day Wing Commander Walker, commander of No. 78 Squadron, led twenty aircraft of his squadron from Kiriwina to Nadzab. Four days later, fifteen Vengeance dive bombers of No. 24 Squadron led by Squadron Leader Honey followed the Kittyhawks from Kiriwina to Nadzab. No. 10 Group was now ready to begin action with two squadrons.

On 13th January 1944, the day after their arrival at Nadzab, eighteen Kittyhawks of No. 78, led by Walker, carried out No. 10 Group's first war mission. Their assignment was to patrol the Upper Ramu Valley, the Bogadjim Road, and the north coast of New Guinea from Madang to

[6] Gp Capt W. A. C. Dale, CBE, DSO, 260182. Asst Dir Works and Bldgs 1939-43; comd 62 Airfield Construction Wing 1943-45. Civil engineer; of Coonamble, NSW; b. Sydney, 18 Nov 1904.

Saidor, and to machine-gun any target that presented itself; but the main purpose of the flight was to give the pilots an idea of the country over which they were to operate. For most of the flight cloud and rain shut out the ground and no machine-gunning was carried out. Two of the Kittyhawks were forced to land at Saidor with electrical defects, but later flew back safely to Nadzab. By the afternoon the weather had improved and the Kittyhawks were loaded with bombs and sent out to bomb Erima plantation, seventeen miles south of Madang, which was being used by the Japanese as a staging point for supplies and ammunition destined either for the Ramu Valley or the Rai coast. The Kittyhawks bombed the target and met no opposition from the enemy. They bombed it again the following day and again on 15th January. Mitchell bombers of the Fifth Air Force also attacked Erima on this day.

On 16th January the target was Yaula, near the upper end of the Bogadjim Road. Boomerangs of No. 4 led twelve Kittyhawks from No. 78 to an attack on motor transport dispersals. The Boomerangs dived towards the target, machine-gunning it with tracer ammunition to indicate it to the Kittyhawks. The Kittyhawks then followed them down, dropping their bombs and machine-gunning. Ten of their twelve bombs landed on the target. On the return flight to Nadzab some of the Kittyhawks dived to tree-top level to machine-gun Japanese-occupied villages at Kwato, Old Yaula, and Daumoina, while the others flew at 6,000 feet to protect the low strafers from possible enemy interference. Again Fifth Air Force Bostons and Mitchells bombed and strafed in the same area.

After the fall of Nadzab, Lae and Finschhafen the 7th Australian Division had pushed on rapidly up the Markham Valley. Its drive was so successful that by December the division had reached the Shaggy Ridge area, forcing the Japanese back towards Bogadjim. No. 4 Squadron R.A.A.F. had continued to lead-in attacks made by squadrons of the Fifth Air Force which were supporting the Australians on the ground.

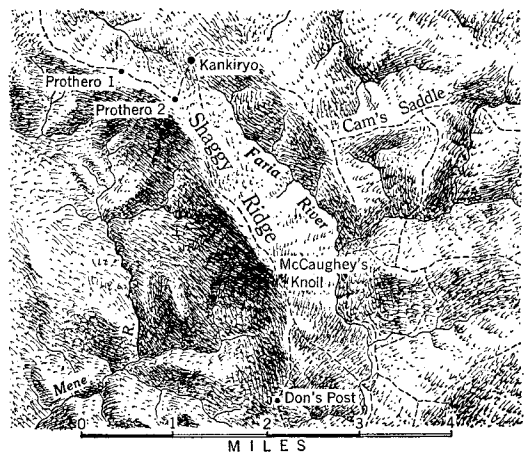
On 2nd January, as mentioned earlier, part of the 32nd American Division had landed at Saidor on the Rai coast; and on 15th January Sio was taken. The 5th Australian Division then took over the advance. The Australians were to push up the Rai coast to link with the Americans at Saidor, while the Americans moved along the coast to Astrolabe Bay and Bogadjim, where they would link with the Australians moving on the inland route.

General Vasey had been drawing all his close air support from the Fifth Air Force and did not feel inclined to transfer this responsibility to No. 10 Group when it arrived at Nadzab. In January his troops were faced with a difficult task in capturing Shaggy Ridge and his plans called for heavy air attacks by the Fifth Air Force. A number of the support missions was assigned to No. 10 Group.

One object of the Shaggy Ridge attack was to remove a Japanese threat to the important Allied air base near by at Gusap, on the bank of the upper Ramu Valley, which was the base nearest to Hollandia where the Japanese maintained strong air units. Vasey planned a three-pronged

assault. One prong would be against the twin mountain features known as "Prothero 1" and "Prothero 2", the second against the ridge itself, and a third along the Faria River valley; D-day was 20th January. Air support was to be given before and during the assault and all available 25-pounder guns were to help in the destruction of the enemy defences.

On 17th January, three days before the main attack, to be carried out by the 18th Brigade, Scherger directed Nos. 24 and 78 to bomb and strafe the Kankiryo saddle in the Shaggy Ridge area. This was to be No. 24's first mission for No. 10 Group and it was part of the softening-up program. The Kittyhawks were to escort the Vengeances and in addition carry their own bomb load. The two squadrons took off from Newton Field at 10 o'clock in the morning and over Gusap were joined by two Boomerangs of No. 4 which were to lead them to the Kankiryo feature. The Kittyhawks scissored 4,000 feet above the Vengeance formation. The Boomerangs went in to the attack first, followed by the Vengeances, which dropped nine tons of bombs and then machine-gunned. The Kittyhawks then carried out similar attacks.




Next morning Mitchells of the Fifth Air Force bombed the ridge and No. 78 flew overhead to protect them from possible enemy interference. These attacks were repeated in the afternoon and again the Kittyhawks of No. 78 gave protective cover.

On 19th January, the eve of the 18th Brigade's assault, eleven Kittyhawks covered a strike by twelve Vengeances on the same target. This attack was not successful, bombs landing up to 800 yards from the target. The artillery was to fire smoke shells to indicate where the bombs were to be dropped, but before they could do so the Vengeance pilots had seen smoke billowing out from the jungle and had begun their attack. It looked as though the Japanese had anticipated the bombing attack and fired their own smoke shells to draw the attack away from their positions.

Heavy rain fell on the night of 19th-20th January, the eve of the assault, increasing the difficulties of the 18th Brigade. No. 10 Group had been assigned the task of hitting the first objective, Cam's Saddle, where an estimated 200 Japanese had been seen. Twelve Vengeances led by Honey took off at 10 a.m. accompanied by Kittyhawks. The weather was still bad and Honey had difficulty in finding the target, which was hidden

behind clouds and rain squalls. While the Vengeances were circling the target waiting for the ground troops to fire their smoke shells, the enemy began firing at them. Twenty minutes passed before the pilots saw the smoke shells and immediately afterwards they began the attack, diving 1,000 feet through clouds to ensure accuracy. This time there was no failure. They dropped 22 bombs, 14 of which fell directly on the target. Then a company of the 2/10th Battalion advanced west along the saddle and, after minor skirmishing, cleared the enemy from the feature. Part of the 2/12th Battalion which attacked "Prothero 1" came under fire from a 75-mm gun at point-blank range and this held up their advance. However a company of the battalion, after a stiff climb, rushed the gun position and captured it.

The next objective of the 2/12th Battalion was "Prothero 2" some hundred yards farther on. Vengeances escorted by Kittyhawks attacked this target before the assault on 22nd January. Honey took off at 9.50 in the morning followed by ten other Vengeances and eleven Kittyhawks. They dropped 11 tons of bombs on the target, again with great accuracy. Then a company of the 2/12th advanced again, ousting the Japanese from the feature, and, pushing farther along Shaggy Ridge, seized McCaughey's Knoll. By 23rd January the fight for Shaggy Ridge had been won, and by 26th January Kankiryo Saddle was in Australian hands.

On 23rd January the Vengeances, again accompanied by No. 78, aided operations near Kesawai, where the 15th Brigade was raiding the Japanese right flank as a diversionary action for the main Shaggy Ridge operation.

The defeat of the enemy forces on Shaggy Ridge gave security to Gusap airfield and Kenney was able to proceed with plans to use this base for the next phase of the air war in the South-West Pacific. Essentially the Markham Valley-Upper Ramu Valley campaigns were undertaken to provide Kenney with convenient places for the establishment of his growing air forces. As soon as these two valleys had been seized and made secure the strategic purpose of the ground operations was achieved.

Twenty-three Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron had arrived at Nadzab from Dobodura on 19th January and the next day this squadron began operating with No. 10 Group. Twelve machines led by Squadron Leader Kinninmont escorted thirty-seven Mitchells in an attack on Hansa Bay. Afterwards they flew along the coast machine-gunning anything that appeared of use to the enemy. They fired on a lugger and eight barges and on stores at one end of Nubia airfield, and machine-gunned the jetty and a large building on Karkar Island. The enemy fired on them from the ground, but no enemy aircraft attempted to interfere with the sweep. On 24th January the Vengeances and two squadrons of Mitchells were sent to bomb buildings at the south end of Gragat Island near Madang. Kittyhawks of both Nos. 75 and 78 escorted them. Four of the Kittyhawks returned with the Vengeances after they had attacked while the rest of the Kittyhawks remained and machine-gunned buildings on the island.

In the last week of January, General Whitehead directed No. 10 Group to provide fighter aircraft for the "Valley Patrol". The purpose of this

patrol was to protect the Markham Valley between Gusap and Lae from surprise air attacks. The enemy was still sending occasional raiders into the valley and because of the high mountains on either side the radar stations set up could not detect the raiders until it was too late. It was therefore necessary to have fighters patrolling continually. The patrol would fly during the hours of daylight at 16,000 feet and sometimes another flight would fly at a lower level.

The routine "valley patrol" duty and the task of escorting R.A.A.F. and American bombers on their missions became the principal duties of the squadrons of No. 78 Wing. Pilots began to criticise the American command for assigning the R.A.A.F. fighters to these tasks. Scherger, commenting on this later, said: "Not unnaturally our pilots became 'browned off' with this task and became rather critical of the American Command, which in their opinion was giving all the interesting work to American pilots and none to them. This however was not so, as Major-General Whitehead insisted that all new fighter units take over this patrol as a probationary task."[7]

Operations of No. 10 Group continued until 27th January without loss of life to aircrews. On that day, however, No. 75 lost two pilots during attacks on islands near Madang. Four of the Kittyhawks dived on Jomba Island firing their machine-guns. The section leader (Flying Officer Hunt[8]) collided with Pilot Officer Stirling's[9] aircraft which was directly below him. The planes exploded in mid-air, killing both pilots.

The Vengeance squadron gave support to army forces on 29th January when they attacked a Japanese position at Orgoruna which was holding up the advance. They dropped bombs and then strafed Orgoruna village. Kittyhawks of No. 78 went with the Vengeances and also carried bombs which they dropped on the target. Two of the Vengeances had engine trouble and one was forced to crash-land on the banks of the Markham River, ten miles from Nadzab. The crew (Pilot Officer Stevens,[1] pilot, and Flight Sergeant Main,[2] observer) escaped injury, and food and equipment were dropped to them for two days before they were rescued.

On the last day of January No. 24 was assigned to destroy the Gori River bridge at Bogadjim. Escort of eight Thunderbolt aircraft of No. 35 American Squadron was provided. Six Vengeances were to take part but one blew a tyre during take-off, while two others failed to find the bridge. However, the other three, led by Flight Lieutenant Lewis,[3] after finding the bridge, began diving on it from 2,500 feet. Japanese anti-aircraft guns opened fire on them but the Vengeances dived through it

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[7] Air Cmdre F. R. W. Scherger, Report on No. 10 Gp.

[8] F-O S. B. Hunt, 412078; 75 Sqn. Grazier; of Euroa, Vic; b. Gladesville, NSW, 2 Apr 1918. Killed in action 27 Jan 1944.

[9] P-O J. McL. Stirling, 405427; 75 Sqn. Jackeroo; of Pittsworth, Qld; b. Pittsworth, 8 Apr 1921. Killed in action 27 Jan 1944.

[1] F-Lt L. A. Stevens, 405608; 24 Sqn. Stockman; of Richmond, Qld; b. Hughenden, Qld, 12 Feb 1917.

[2] F-O H. G. Main, 413217; 24 Sqn. Student; of Portland, NSW; b. Hurstville, NSW, 27 Apr 1922.

[3] Sqn Ldr R. L. Lewis, DFC, 406166. 602 Sqn RAF and 24 Sqn; comd 24 Sqn 1944. Farmer; of Kojonup, WA; b. Auga, Central Provinces, India, 10 Dec 1912.

to release their bombs at between 400 and 800 feet. Four of the 500-lb bombs hit the bridge and destroyed it. Two more exploded at the southern approach where there was an anti-aircraft position, which was silenced. The fragments from the 500-lb bombs struck two of the Vengeances as they pulled out of their dives. After destroying the bridge the Vengeances machine-gunned the road leading to the bridge and the near-by village of Baumonna.

On 30th January Kenney had returned to Brisbane after having attended conferences in Washington and Pearl Harbour. He had been able to obtain a further two groups of bombers and it was also decided that the Thirteenth Air Force, which had been operating under Admiral Halsey in the South Pacific Area, would be placed under his control. South Pacific Area Command was to be disbanded as there would be little more for it to do after Rabaul had been isolated and neutralised. By the end of 1943 the Fifth Air Force had already grown to 78 squadrons, compared with 36 on 31st March 1943. In the same period, because of commitments under the Empire Air Training Scheme to send aircrews and ground personnel to other theatres, the R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific had only grown from 34 squadrons to 45.

General Kenney wanted the Wewak air bases kept down in preparation for the Admiralty Islands operation and as soon as he returned from Washington ordered the Fifth Air Force to bombard the four airfields there. Kittyhawks of Nos. 75 and 78 as well as American fighter squadrons were to give close escort to the Mitchells and Liberators assigned to these attacks. Twelve Kittyhawks of No. 75 led by Kinninmont and twelve from No. 78 led by Walker provided cover for three squadrons of American Mitchells on 3rd February. Both R.A.A.F. squadrons, after taking off from Nadzab, made a rendezvous with the Mitchells at 10.45 a.m. over Gusap airfield. They then accompanied the Mitchells to But airfield. The Mitchells flew just above the jungle when approaching But, while the Kittyhawks flew at between 4,000 and 5,000 feet. No enemy planes attempted to interfere. Kenney described the action as follows:[4]

> Right behind the heavies and just over the tree tops came sixty-two B-25's [Mitchells] escorted by sixty-six fighters, which kept on going and swept over But and Dagua. The strategy worked. The Nip behaved perfectly and had his planes lined up nicely, most of them with the engines turning over, crews in their seats and mechanics standing by, when the storm hit them. At But and Dagua alone, sixty Nip planes were destroyed on the ground while the fighters shot down another sixteen in air combat. We had no losses.

Next day the air bombardment at Wewak was resumed and again the Kittyhawks of Nos. 75 and 78 provided close escort. Kinninmont reported seeing sixteen enemy aircraft when the Allied formation reached Wewak. They circled about twenty miles south-east of the target and then headed out to sea. There was no contact.

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[4] Kenney, p. 351.

No. 24 was taken off operations at the end of January and for two weeks in February the crews carried out much-needed training exercises at Lake Wanum. Scherger had found that not all his aircrews were trained well enough to be put into action immediately. All crews had graduated from R.A.A.F. Operational Training Units on the mainland, but these units were all in the southern part of Australia where weather and other conditions affecting operations were very different from those in New Guinea. Scherger wrote later:

> We were obliged to spend a good deal of time on training particularly when the group first moved to New Guinea and the need for forward Operational Training Units became more and more pressing as time went on. . . . In the systems of operational training there was a marked difference between the American and Australian methods. The Americans did some operational training back in America, but most of this type of training was done in New Guinea and the operational training crews were "blooded" by attacking relatively innocuous targets in Japanese held territory which had been by-passed. . . . Of the two systems there is again little doubt that the American system was the superior and if R.A.A.F. units are employed outside Australia in the future, it will be necessary to provide operational training units not far from the tactical zone.

No. 10 Group gained in strength on 9th February when eighteen machines of its second Vengeance Squadron (No. 23) landed at Nadzab from Lowood (Queensland). A familiarisation flight was flown by the squadron on 10th February, and the next day it carried out its first operation with No. 24. The American units at Saidor reported that Japanese troops were using native villages along the Rai coast as staging points in the flight towards Bogadjim. They called for bombing attacks on the villages of Yoga Yoga, Tarikngan and Gwarawan, south of Saidor. Six Vengeances of No. 23 led by the commanding officer, Wing Commander Philp,[5] and six from No. 24 led by Lewis, took part in the mission. They were given an escort of four Kittyhawks of No. 75 and four Thunderbolts of the Fifth Air Force. The American ground forces reported that 300 Japanese left Tarikngan village just before the attack. Another 99 left immediately after the attack. Yoga Yoga village was demolished, several direct hits being scored.

Attacks on the remnants of the Japanese *20th Division* retreating westward, and on airfields at Alexishafen and Madang, were the main duties of the Vengeances in February. By 18th February the aircraft of the remaining Vengeance Squadron (No. 21) had arrived at Nadzab and the whole of No. 77 Wing was then operational. No. 21 carried out its first mission on 22nd February when three of its aircraft accompanied Nos. 23 and 24 in an attack on barge hideouts on the Wagol River, Madang.

On 24th February the Vengeances extended their attacks as far west as Hansa Bay. Twenty-three aircraft of Nos. 21 and 23 escorted by twelve Kittyhawks of No. 75 were sent to dive-bomb anti-aircraft positions there. Two sections of the Kittyhawk squadron attacked first, machine-gunning the anti-aircraft positions from tree-top level. They continued

[5] W Cdr T. R. Philp, DFC, 270531. 12 Sqn; comd 23 Sqn 1943-44. Station overseer; of Indooroopilly, Qld; b. Townsville, Qld, 17 Dec 1917.

on to Nubia airfield strafing targets of opportunity. The strafing run did not silence the anti-aircraft guns at Hansa Bay, and when the Vengeances began their attack they were greeted by heavy Japanese fire. No. 21 suffered no hits from the enemy guns but No. 23 lost two machines. One piloted by Flying Officer Burnell,[6] with Captain Watson,[7] an army liaison officer, as his observer, failed to pull out of its dive and crashed into the water about 300 yards from the target. Another Vengeance, with Flight Sergeant McDonald[8] as pilot and Flying Officer McAllister[9] as observer, did not return to base after being hit by the anti-aircraft gunfire.

MacArthur's swift move to the Admiralty Islands on 29th February made it imperative that enemy airfields at Alexishafen and Madang should be incapable of use for staging in enemy attacks against the landing force, and No. 10 Group squadrons as well as the Fifth Air Force were directed to carry out heavy attacks on these points. The all-out effort of the Vengeances had begun on 26th February. Twelve aircraft each from Nos. 21 and 23 attacked No. 1 Strip at Alexishafen, while twelve from No. 24 concentrated on Madang. These attacks were repeated next day and on 28th February a total of 33 Vengeances escorted by 29 Kittyhawks of No. 78 and the newly-arrived No. 80 Squadron combined in a 62-plane strike on both strips at Alexishafen and one at Madang. Buildings in the Madang township and near-by islands were also heavily machine-gunned. The Kittyhawks as well as the Vengeances carried bombs which were dropped on the airfields, digging up the runways and destroying buildings and stores. The Vengeance crews considered that the airfields were out of order before their attacks began as no attempt had been made to repair the damage caused by previous bombing. The Madang strip was covered with bomb craters filled with water. As there was little risk of interference from enemy fighters, No. 24 pilots stayed over Madang for twenty minutes, strafing buildings in the township and the small islands off the coast.

The total number of sorties flown by No. 10 Group during the month of February was 1,467, comprising 62 missions. A total of about 210 tons of bombs was dropped. No. 78 had flown 1,007 hours. The rate of effort by this squadron was considerably above the 600 hours per squadron which was the normal operating effort for R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons.

No. 10 Group had based its organisation on that of the R.A.F. rather than that of the American Fifth Air Force with which it was working so closely in New Guinea. It was, however, imperative that the R.A.A.F.,

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[6] F-O N. G. Burnell, 409289; 23 Sqn. Clerk; of Ivanhoe, Vic; b. Berri, SA, 11 Dec 1922. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

[7] Capt W. P. Watson, NX112723. 30 Bn, 50 AALU. Bank clerk; of Cremorne, NSW; b. North Sydney, 26 Mar 1919. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

[8] F-Sgt F. G. McDonald, 418154; 23 Sqn. Clerk; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. East Malvern, Vic, 29 Sep 1922. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

[9] F-O C. McAllister, 23352; 23 Sqn. Steward; of Wilston, Qld; b. Brisbane, 29 May 1921. Killed in action 24 Feb 1944.

which was the smaller force, should adapt its methods to the Fifth Air Force so that the two could work together effectively. Briefing rooms, operations rooms and procedures had to be made interchangeable. Whitehead demanded a vast increase in the flying effort by the R.A.A.F. units and his demands forced a decision that No. 10 Group should reorganise. Scherger described later how this problem was met:

> On the rather inflexible "planned flying planned maintenance" adapted from the R.A.F. by our technical people, it was estimated that only 600 hours per month per squadron could be flown in the fighter wing—whereas we were being called on to fly up to 1,500 hours per month per squadron. It was remarkable at the time that the maintenance men we had were quite capable of dealing with the extra maintenance, but the provision of spares, particularly of spare engines, and the number of pilots allotted to each squadron was nowhere near adequate for this amount of flying. After considerable interchange of signals with R.A.A.F. Headquarters, the Deputy Chief of the Air Staff personally visited the Group (Air Commodore McCauley arrived at Nadzab on 4th March) and was convinced by General Whitehead that either our units flew the hours required of them or they would not be given aerodrome space in the forward areas. As a result of this visit, the number of pilots per squadron was increased to thirty and the number of aircraft to twenty-four, with a further thirty-six in immediate reserve at a repair and service unit. It was gratifying to find later that the steps taken by Air Force Headquarters to build these units to a level where they were capable of rates of effort comparable with those of the Americans, resulted, later in the year, in the squadrons of No. 78 Wing consistently outflying similar American units.

The R.A.F. system was suitable for conditions in Great Britain where there was no shortage of airfield space, but in New Guinea where forward airfield space was limited, squadrons had to be prepared to maintain a higher rate of effort. So long as such space was limited, Whitehead would not be prepared to make space available for three Australian squadrons when one American squadron could produce the same operational effort. Indeed, Scherger considered that had No. 10 Group not been brought forward to Nadzab when it was, Whitehead would not have called it forward at all because by February airfield space there was at a premium.

The Americans had a different system of changing and replacing their men. The R.A.A.F. system was based on a tropical tour of 9 months for operational aircrew and from 15 to 18 months for ground staff. American aircrews served a period of about 6 months of operations followed by a 2 or 3 weeks' rest period on the Australian mainland, followed by a further 3 months' operations and again a further break on the mainland. After a period of about 18 months' service the aircrews would be sent back to the United States for at least 4 weeks. Scherger considered the American system the better.[1] He wrote:

> The American system was, of course, infinitely superior to ours in that unit spirit and morale, operational efficiency and indeed all round efficiency was increasing the whole time, whereas under our system, personnel were constantly changing and efficiency could not reach the highest level. It presented one with an efficiency graph much like the serrated edge of a saw—with an infinite number of peaks and troughs but with none of the peaks very high.

[1] There was by no means unanimity in the RAAF on the question of tours of duty

In the first week of March, the Fifth Air Force was engaged both directly and indirectly in support of the invasion of the Admiralty Islands. Heavy raids continued against Alexishafen and Madang which the enemy might use for staging air attacks. The Vengeance squadrons, escorted by Kittyhawks, took part in these operations.

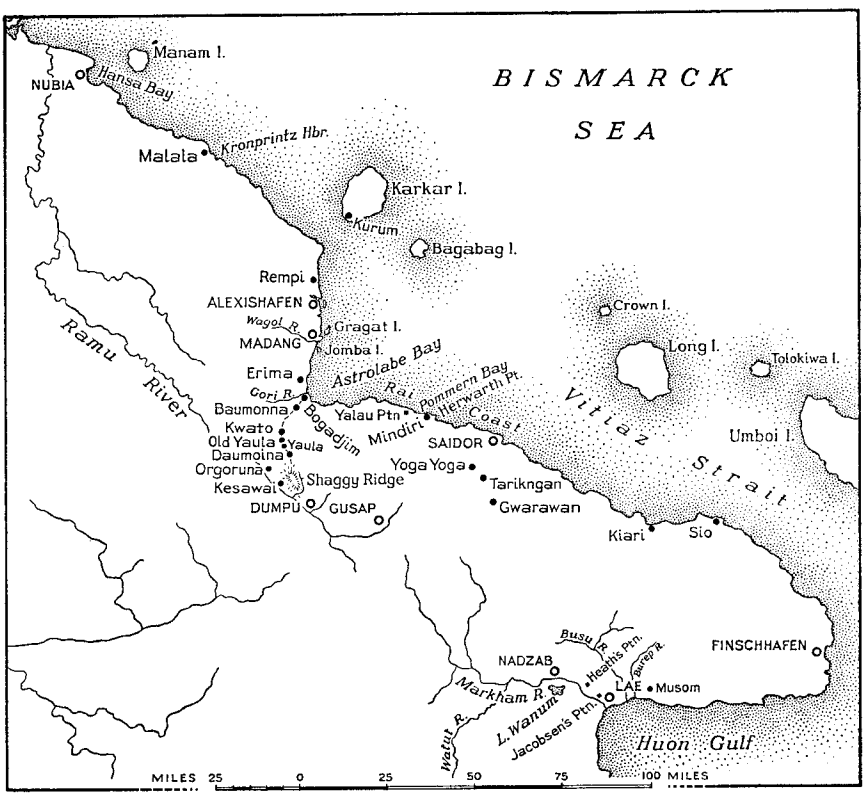
On 2nd March 24 Vengeances escorted by 12 Kittyhawks of No. 80 bombed and strafed targets on Karkar Island. The Vengeances dive-bombed villages and a mission at Kurum and then strafed with both rear and front guns. The pilots saw no signs of enemy activity except slight anti-aircraft gunfire. Reaching the target at 11 a.m. No. 23 climbed to 13,000 feet, manoeuvred into line astern and then dived towards Kurum Mission. One section of the covering force of Kittyhawks followed the dive bombers in a strafing attack on the mission. On the way back to base the Kittyhawks saw and attacked two barges which they left in a damaged state. Nos. 75 and 78 were to escort American Liberators to Hansa Bay that day, but neither squadron was able to find the Liberators at the rendezvous point. No. 78 arrived three minutes ahead of the time appointed for the rendezvous and circled for about 33 minutes waiting for the Liberators. Wing Commander Walker decided not to wait any longer and the squadron flew along the New Guinea coast strafing any targets they could find. The pilots strafed villages near Madang and two barges at the mouth of a river. At Malala near Kronprinz Harbour one of the Kittyhawks (Flying Officer Weber[2]) was hit by ground-fire. Weber was attacking barges at the time and then turned his attention to the strong anti-aircraft position pressing his attack to a very close range. His machine began to burn, a wing fell off, and the aircraft exploded 100 feet above the ground, finally crashing near the anti-aircraft post. Weber was the first member of this squadron to lose his life.

On 5th March there was to be another landing of American infantry at Mindiri on the Rai coast midway between Saidor and Bogadjim and No. 10 Group was assigned to soften the landing area by bombing and strafing. Nos. 23 and 24 began the bombardment on 3rd March when they concentrated their attacks on Mindiri village and a camping area at Herwarth Point nearby. The escorting Kittyhawks also carried bombs which they dropped on the targets. Next day the main target was an enemy camp in Pommern Bay in the same area. All three Vengeance squadrons escorted by the Kittyhawks of No. 80 bombed the target in the morning. They returned to base, refuelled, bombed up again, and returned to the same target in the afternoon. On this day No. 10 Group flew a total of 93 sorties against Mindiri, dropping 35 tons of bombs and firing thousands of rounds of ammunition. They suffered no losses from enemy fire, although one of the Vengeances was damaged in a forced landing on the way back to base. Next morning the Americans landed without opposition at Mindiri. The attack was preceded by further air attacks by American Boston bombers and naval bombardment. The

[2] F-O E. H. Weber, 404864. 23, 83 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of Rockhampton, Qld; b. Rockhampton, 8 Jun 1922. Killed in action 2 Mar 1944.

Americans seized the Yalau plantation soon after the landing and within a few days occupied Mindiri village, where large quantities of enemy supplies were captured.

On the morning of 8th March, thirty-six Vengeances of all three squadrons took off from Nadzab and flew to Rempi village ten miles north of Alexishafen. The weather was so bad that No. 23 was unable to attack Rempi village and dropped its bombs well to the north. The other two




squadrons were able to make an attack by approaching in a shallow dive. Some of the bombs fell in the sea but most fell in the target area, which had already been damaged in earlier attacks. Enemy anti-aircraft fire tore holes in four Vengeances of No. 24, but the damage was not serious.

This was the last mission of the Vengeances in the Pacific war. They were ordered to attack the same target next morning but bad weather prevented them leaving Newton airfield. In the meantime on 8th March MacArthur's headquarters had directed that all Vengeance squadrons were to return to Australia and that the three Kittyhawk squadrons of the group were to withdraw to Cape Gloucester. The sudden decision caused

surprise and speculation in No. 10 Group, which had been in action as a task force at Nadzab for only six weeks. Air crews and ground units had had barely sufficient time to settle in.

Air Commodore Scherger was in Australia at the time and Group Captain Pearce had the responsibility of commencing the withdrawal. He signalled Scherger on 9th March telling him he had been ordered to withdraw but that he would not do so until he received confirmation. Pearce, anxious to know the reasons for the decision, tried to see Whitehead to get more information, but was told that Whitehead had left instructions "not to be disturbed". Tremendous effort had gone into building No. 10 Group into an efficient force and high hopes had been held for its future. It is, therefore, not difficult to imagine the keen disappointment felt by all hands at Newton Field. However, most of the Vengeance crews realised the shortcomings of the aircraft they flew and were resigned to the decision. Scherger signalled Pearce next day directing him to proceed with the moves as ordered. He added that the withdrawal had been proposed by Allied Headquarters and that R.A.A.F. Command had also agreed.

Three factors lay behind the withdrawal of the Vengeances. Firstly, the Vengeance was an inefficient war machine compared with the more advanced aircraft available to Kenney by March 1944. Secondly, the Fifth Air Force had received large reinforcements of modern aircraft from America and more were coming (by 31st March it had 82 squadrons). Thirdly, there was an acute shortage of airfield space to accommodate the squadrons which Kenney now wished to use in knock-out attacks on the Wewak-Hollandia areas.[3] The Vengeances did not have sufficient range to reach Wewak or Hollandia. The R.A.A.F. pilots and observers in these machines were excellent though some were still not fully trained. But there were repeated cases of engine failure with Vengeance machines. Their pilots had difficulty in getting them off the ground with a full load. At Newton Field they were using the full length of the 6,000 feet runway before becoming airborne. Kittyhawk aircraft could carry the same bomb load and in addition carry out ground-strafing. They could fight their own way back to base without the cover needed by the Vengeance which had to have fighter protection when attacking targets where enemy fighters might be met.

The Australian Government spent a large sum of money on Vengeances. When they were first ordered, however, there was an acute shortage of machines and the Government had to take what was offering. Only five had arrived by May 1942 and they did not come forward in substantial numbers until April 1943 by which time the crisis they were designed to meet had passed. Although it was an American machine, the American Air Force did not use it in combat. According to the historians of the

[3] Following are comments by Air Cmdre Scherger on airfield congestion: "From the very commencement of the New Guinea campaign, it was never possible to make available airstrips in the forward zone anywhere near adequate for the number of operational aircraft available. . . . There was no airstrip space available at Nadzab to any but the most virile units, and only then if they were armed with efficient aircraft. The Vengeance units would have gone if they had been American—it was merely the yardstick of efficiency which decided the question."

American Army Air Force, dive bombing was not favoured by that force in any case. They wrote: "Dive bombing, early advocated by Mitchell and fundamental to Navy tactics, found little support in the Air Corps."[4]

General Kenney informed Air Vice-Marshal Jones that he no longer intended to use Vengeances in operations in the South-West Pacific Area. Jones immediately signalled the R.A.A.F. representative in Washington directing him to cancel the "assignment and delivery" of the Vengeance aircraft—about fifty-six—ordered but not already shipped from the United States.

It was Kenney's intention to move a group of long-range Lightning fighters, capable of reaching Hollandia, into Newton Field and No. 77 Wing had to make way for it. The Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing also had to leave Newton Field, to take the place of the No. 8 Fighter Group which had been supporting the 1st Marine Division on New Britain and which was now moving to Nadzab. The Lightnings were having difficulty in operating from Cape Gloucester airfield because mud was splashing up through the steel mat of the runway. Although it had a lesser range, the Kittyhawk was more rugged in construction and could operate under the conditions at Cape Gloucester. To compensate for the loss of the three Vengeance squadrons and keep the group up to strength, Kenney directed that No. 77 Wing Headquarters was to remain assigned to No. 10 Group and take control of three squadrons of No. 9 Group. The three squadrons were Nos. 22 (Boston), 30 (Beaufighters) and one Beaufort squadron.

Concurrently with the withdrawal of No. 10 Group from Nadzab, Kenney was reorganising areas of responsibility. On 26th February he had issued instructions that by 1st March, Bostock's command was to take over control of No. 9 Operational Group, but not its tactical units (except one Beaufort squadron).[5] At the same time he extended the responsibility of R.A.A.F. Command to include the Port Moresby-Milne Bay areas, for which, up to then, the Fifth Air Force had been responsible. This was an extension of the area system of command prevailing on the mainland of Australia. Bostock was to take over anti-submarine patrol and passive defence measures and set up at Port Moresby operational training facilities for R.A.A.F. crews who were to join operational squadrons in the South-West Pacific Area.

After this reorganisation, Bostock, on 2nd March, informed Air Force Headquarters that he desired the title of No. 9 Group changed to "Northern Area" and the title of No. 10 Group changed to "Tactical Air Force, R.A.A.F.". He also proposed "to seek the approval of the Commander, Allied Air Forces, for the transfer of the maximum number of squadrons from the defensive areas to the Tactical Air Force". The effect of this policy would be to reduce No. 9 Group to a line of communication area similar to those in Australia, and build up No. 10 Group to a large mobile tactical force. Jones would not agree to the changes of title. Jones also wrote to Kenney on 8th March stating that "so far as this Headquarters

[4] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol I, p. 598.
[5] *AAF, SWPA, Ops Instructions No. 45*, issued 26 Feb 1944.

is concerned, the whole of the R.A.A.F. units in New Guinea are under the command and administrative control of the A.O.C. No. 9 Group Air Commodore F. W. Lukis, and it is not intended for the present to change this arrangement".

Kenney replied on 15th March informing Jones that "no assurance could be given that R.A.A.F. units may not be quickly switched from one operational headquarters to another". He wrote:

> The operational control of all R.A.A.F. units North and East of the revised boundary line is invested in the Deputy Commander, Fifth Air Force. The contention of your Headquarters that all of the R.A.A.F. units in New Guinea are under the command of the Air Officer Commanding, 9th Operational Group, leads to a question as to the practicability of such an arrangement. This headquarters must continue to dispose its tactical units in accordance with the tactical situation and no assurance can be given that R.A.A.F. units may not be quickly switched from one operational headquarters to another. Every effort has been made to preserve the combination of R.A.A.F. units in the 9th and 10th Operational Groups. However, recent tactical changes tended to modify the original composition and roles of the Operational Groups in New Guinea. The Deputy Commander, Fifth Air Force, is directly responsible for air force offensive tactical operations in New Guinea. To perform this function the Deputy Commander effects an organisation and makes changes therein subject only to the supervision of the Commander, Allied Air Forces. The disposition of Air Commodore F. W. Lukis is, of course, at your discretion. The manner of obtaining administrative control of R.A.A.F. units in New Guinea must be worked out by your Headquarters. If arrangements which you effect are disturbed by our operational requirements, it can only be pointed out that the dual system of operating R.A.A.F. units has that inherent disadvantage. However, there can be no doubt that tactical requirements must be given primary consideration.
>
> This headquarters is well aware of the limitations of the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command to provide certain communications, operational facilities, maintenance of airdromes etc. As previously pointed out in past correspondence this headquarters will require the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command to perform certain operational tasks with the intention that the means to carry out these commitments must be arranged for by the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command. . . . If it is impracticable for your Headquarters to give effect to the wishes of the Commander, Allied Air Forces, this headquarters will expect to be informed fully in order that substitutive arrangements can be effected. All dealings of an operational nature involving R.A.A.F. units are conducted by this headquarters, through the Air Officer Commanding R.A.A.F. Command and your Advanced Headquarters, Brisbane, is kept informed as to all contemplated moves involving R.A.A.F. units.
>
> Further to your letter only one operational group to conduct R.A.A.F. offensive operations is currently required. This is being accomplished by placing R.A.A.F. units for this purpose in 10th Operational Group at Cape Gloucester. The garrison at Manus Island is primarily a fighter sector which will be scaled down as the tactical situation dictates to permit further forward movement of R.A.A.F. units.

Since Kenney had operational control, his wishes on the tactical disposition of R.A.A.F. squadrons in New Guinea prevailed. But these differences of view on the control and organisation of the R.A.A.F. again emphasised the difficulties met from time to time as a result of the dual control of the R.A.A.F. units on operational duty in the South-West Pacific Area. The lamentable situation arose at this time whereby Jones, after consultation with the Government, issued an organisation memorandum on

11th April changing the name of No. 9 Group to "Northern Command", when Bostock two days earlier had directed that for "all operational purposes" No. 9 Group Headquarters was to be "regarded" as "HQ, Northern Area". The name which the formation was to bear was a matter of little moment. But the fact that such a small matter could not be easily settled indicated the flaw in the organisation of the command of the R.A.A.F.

The packing and movement of the units of No. 10 Group from Nadzab had begun immediately. Bewildered equipment officers who had not yet completed straightening out the chaos caused by the hurried mobilisation and movement from Australia, were now faced with the task of moving again.

The Vengeance squadrons had been grounded on 9th March, but the Kittyhawks had remained operational and on 11th March they provided protection for the American air transports which now shuttled to and fro carrying No. 10 Group to Cape Gloucester and the American units from Cape Gloucester to Nadzab. It took 122 aircraft loads to move the advanced parties of No. 78 Wing. The movement of these parties began on 11th March and was completed by 15th March. The Kittyhawks of No. 80 Squadron arrived at Cape Gloucester on 14th March followed by No. 78 on the 16th and No. 75 on 18th March. The Vengeance aircraft of all three squadrons had already left for Australia on 13th March. Their ground staffs were to follow by sea at a later date.

This rapid move was a test of mobility and the group passed the test well, although commanders had to cast aside a lot of useful odds and ends which had been collected by a continuous process of "scrounging" and "magpieing". Scherger stated that he "had to be quite ruthless in seeing that units did not collect a mass of equipment which although possibly useful, merely bogged them down to an extent which rendered them virtually static". "It was quite amazing to notice," he continued, "that American units never made the least attempt to 'scrounge' equipment or material, and there is little doubt in my mind that 'scrounging' is a characteristic only of a Service which has been or is starved of adequate supplies for all its requirements."

On 17th March, R.A.A.F. operations began from Cape Gloucester when seven Kittyhawks of No. 80 attacked Garove Island, north of New Britain. They approached the island at 10.30 a.m. flying at 8,000 feet, formed up in line astern losing height to 1,500 feet, and dropped their bombs on the island between the factory and a jetty. The Kittyhawks then separated making individual strafing runs at a low level on the jetty, the factory and Japanese seen among the coconut trees. The Kittyhawk pilots then returned to Cape Gloucester and in the afternoon four more machines, led by Squadron Leader Jackson, who also took part in the morning raid, reconnoitred the Hoskins airfield area, strafing a barge and villages.

The Kittyhawks' work at Cape Gloucester included missions in support of the 1st Marine Division, assisting American patrol torpedo boats, and

giving fighter cover for convoys to and from the Admiralty Islands as well as fighter protection of the Cape Gloucester base.

The first mission by No. 78 Squadron from Cape Gloucester on 18th March was Garove Island where it bombed and strafed barges, anti-aircraft positions and buildings. On this day "B" Flight of No. 4 Squadron equipped with five Boomerang aircraft and one Wirraway, arrived at Cape Gloucester commanded by Flight Lieutenant Watchorn.[6] Under the direction of the Sixth American Army this flight began plotting Japanese troop movements along escape routes from Arawe and Gasmata to the Gazelle Peninsula, and locating bivouac areas, barge hideouts and staging points.

On 25th March thirty-seven Kittyhawks of all three squadrons combined in attacks on what was believed to be a Japanese headquarters in the Hoskins area. The area was thoroughly bombed and strafed, but the results of the attack could not be accurately assessed.

On the morning of 27th March four Kittyhawks of No. 78, on a sweep for enemy barges, attacked two American patrol boats in error. The patrol boats opened fire on the Kittyhawks when they began to strafe, but one of the boats sank and the other blew up. Of the boat crews 4 were killed, 3 were missing and 5 wounded. The Kittyhawk pilots saw the Americans swimming towards the shore while others clung to a dinghy. They then realised their mistake and one of the pilots threw a dinghy out to them. A court of inquiry held later showed that the cause of this unfortunate incident was that the pilots had not been told that Allied surface vessels would be engaged in operations on that morning during daylight. Delays in the R.A.A.F. signals and cypher organisation had prevented the information reaching the operations room of No. 78 Wing in time for the pilots to be briefed.

Operations of No. 78 Wing continued at a high rate of effort until the end of March and into April, when the wing was ordered to prepare for yet another move. Whitehead had assigned them a role in the Hollandia-Aitape landings which were to take place on 22nd April. In order to prepare for this duty, operations from Cape Gloucester were cut to a minimum.

[6] F-Lt F. A. Watchorn, DFC, 400848. 5 and 4 Sqns. Clerk; of Frankston, Vic; b. Moonee Ponds, Vic, 3 Oct 1921.

CHAPTER 13

# AIR SUPPORT AT HOLLANDIA AND AITAPE

ON 7th March 1944 General MacArthur, anxious to exploit his success in the Admiralty Islands and the growing signs of enemy weakness in western New Guinea, issued instructions for landings at Hollandia and Aitape. Commanders considered such a long jump ahead something of a gamble but planning staffs promptly went to work on the details of the operation which was to bear the code name RECKLESS. General Krueger of the Sixth American Army was to coordinate the planning and command the task forces assigned.

The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff gave formal approval to the operation on 12th March. In a joint directive to General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz on this day they ordered the South-West Pacific forces to complete the isolation of Rabaul and Kavieng with a minimum of forces; to launch an attack on Hollandia on the 15th April in order to establish heavy bombardment groups there for aid in the New Guinea campaign and to assist in the neutralisation of the Palaus, and, after such other operations as were feasible in preparation for support of the invasions of Palau and Mindanao, to invade Mindanao on 15th November. Truk was to be by-passed and Nimitz's forces would go into the southern Marianas on the 15th June and into the Palaus on 15th September. After these operations dates were indefinite, but MacArthur was directed to prepare a plan for the occupation of Luzon, and Nimitz a plan to occupy Formosa.

Hollandia was 500 miles west of Saidor. Establishment of his forces in this area, MacArthur had radioed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 5th March, would have wide implications. It would hopelessly isolate about 40,000 of the enemy ground forces along the New Guinea coast; would place in Allied hands aerodromes from which the land-based air forces could dominate the Vogelkop Peninsula, and hasten the advance westward by several months.

This bold move called for landings on beachheads which would be too far from the Allied airfields in the Ramu Valley for General Kenney's fighters to give continuous air cover, but the operation would be made feasible by the use of carrier-based aircraft which could give fighter protection until Kenney established his own fighter groups at Hollandia. It was for this reason that the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had ordered Admiral Nimitz to provide this temporary carrier-based support at Hollandia and he and General MacArthur were to meet in Brisbane to prepare plans for the "coordination and mutual support" of this and other operations ordered in the directive of 12th March.

Much depended on the speed with which captured Japanese airfields could be repaired so that Allied fighter aircraft could be brought in. At Hollandia the American troops would have to push ahead against opposition for fifteen miles from the coast across hills to capture an airfield, and

it was doubtful if the United States Navy carriers would remain in the area for the ten to fifteen days needed for this advance, and the establishing of air facilities. It therefore became necessary to make a lesser landing at Aitape, 115 miles east of Hollandia. Intelligence reports indicated that there were only 500 Japanese in this area, including an airfield construction unit and anti-aircraft and signal troops. It would be possible to seize the airfield in one day and, after repairs had been made, fighters could use it to cover the Hollandia operation when the carriers had left. MacArthur therefore ordered that Aitape be occupied and fighter facilities be established there as quickly as possible in order to relieve the carriers and assist in subsequent campaigns in the Hollandia area.

The critical period of the operation would be when the carriers returned to their bases and before the land-based aircraft were firmly established. MacArthur expected strong air counter-attacks from the enemy in this period and to meet it he directed Kenney to bombard heavily the Japanese airfields in the Geelvink Bay area, the Banda Sea and at Wakde-Sarmi. General Krueger had to make plans for hurried reinforcement at Hollandia and Aitape, particularly the latter because of its nearness to the major Japanese ground forces at Wewak, where Adachi's *XVIII Army* was concentrating.

After the conferences in Brisbane between MacArthur and Nimitz at the end of March the date for the assault was fixed at 22nd April. Nimitz was to direct his Fifth Fleet to destroy or contain the Japanese fleet (part of which was in the Palaus) if it attempted to interfere. The Fifth Fleet would also attack the Palaus three weeks before the landing and then neutralise enemy airfields in the Hollandia and Wakde areas.

On 11th March the Fifth Air Force began large-scale bombing attacks in preparation for the Hollandia operation. From 11th to 16th March it dropped 1,600 tons of bombs and fired nearly 1,000,000 rounds of ammunition during attacks on the Wewak airfields. "On the 16th," Kenney wrote, "there was no target left. The runways were full of craters . . .; hundreds of wrecked and burned-out aircraft littered the airdromes and the dispersal bays. Even the trees in the vicinity looked like gaunt skeletons, with their tops and branches gone and showing great gashes and scars from machine-gun fire and bomb fragments."[1]

The next target was Hollandia itself, where the Japanese were trying to build up their air strength on three airfields. Air reconnaissance showed that the Japanese had several hundred aircraft there. On 25th March Admiral Nimitz had told MacArthur in a final conference at Brisbane that he did not want to send his carriers to Hollandia while 200 or 300 Japanese aircraft remained there ready to meet them. Kenney, who was at the conference, promised to eliminate the enemy planes by 5th April.[2] He said it would take his entire bomber force to do it. Kenney had just received from America a number of long-range Lightning fighters which could fly all the way to Hollandia, stay an hour, and get back to Nadzab.

[1] G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, pp. 372-3.
[2] Kenney, pp. 376-7.

These Lightnings would be able to counter enemy fighters which were sure to intercept bombers raiding Hollandia.

On 30th March, sixty-five Liberators, escorted by the long-range Lightnings, attacked Hollandia with fragmentation bombs doing great damage to grounded aircraft. Kenney's aircraft attacked again on the 31st and photographs taken indicated that they had inflicted much damage. On 3rd April after further heavy attacks the destruction seemed complete.

Australian airmen, who at this time were learning to fly Liberator aircraft before the formation of a number of Australian Liberator squadrons, took part in the Hollandia attack on 31st March. The Australians were flying with No. 65 Squadron of the Fifth Air Force which led three groups of Liberators over the target. The second flight of No. 65 was an R.A.A.F. flight led by Squadron Leader O'Brien. It attacked the stores and dispersal areas at Hollandia airfield at 10.30 a.m., dropping hundreds of 20-lb fragmentation and incendiary bombs from 11,000 feet. Enemy fighters attempted to attack it but Lightnings intercepted and frustrated their efforts.

Most of the R.A.A.F. crews chosen to train on Liberator aircraft had already had previous operational flying experience and after flying with American squadrons at Nadzab they were sent to take part in the operations of No. 380 Group at Darwin. In addition to bombing Hollandia the R.A.A.F. crews had also taken part in operations against Wewak, Kavieng, Tadji airfield at Aitape and in the Admiralties.

Under the command of Admiral Spruance a powerful force of carriers, fast battleships, cruisers and destroyers of the Fifth Fleet struck the Palaus and other islands in the Carolines on 30th-31st March. They sank twenty-eight naval and merchant ships, bombed the airfields and sowed mines around the Palaus to immobilise enemy shipping. After this attack the Japanese no longer used the Palaus as a naval base, and moved their naval headquarters to Davao in the Philippines. As recorded elsewhere in this volume, Admiral Koga, the commander-in-chief of the fleet, was lost at sea on 31st March when on his way from the Palaus to Davao.

The Japanese *Fourth Air Army,* after its heavy losses at Wewak, withdrew to Hollandia on 25th March and set up its headquarters there. On 15th April it moved again to Menado in Celebes where it attempted to rally. It was the enemy's intention at this time to operate the *7th Air Division* out of Ambon and the *6th* out of Biak to stem the expected Allied advance. The *6th Air Division* suffered heavily in Kenney's attacks on Hollandia and General Itabana, its commander, was relieved of his command. Many of the aircraft were grounded because of lack of spare parts, and poor maintenance. The accident rate was high and there was a lack of pilots because of illness. Insufficient care had been taken to disperse the aircraft because it was assumed that the long immunity of Hollandia from heavy air attack would continue. Colonel Kaneko, a Japanese officer on the staff of the *Fourth Air Army,* reported that in

the period May 1943 to April 1944 no less than 50 per cent of aircraft lost were destroyed on the ground. Losses in air combat were 30 per cent and from other operational causes 20 per cent. Kaneko said, after the war, that from April 1943 onwards no more than 25 per cent of the aircraft on hand were in full operation at any one time.

In addition to the *Fourth Air Army,* with such aircraft as it still had available, the *23rd Air Flotilla* of the Japanese Navy air service continued operations in the South-West Pacific. After the capture of the Admiralty Islands Koga had ordered the flotilla to move from Kendari to Davao since it was believed likely that the Americans' next move would be to invade Mindanao. However, by April the Japanese considered that the Philippines were not immediately threatened and that the advance would continue along the north coast of New Guinea. Therefore, the *23rd Air Flotilla,* heavily reinforced (it was increased to 180 aircraft by moving units from Malaya, Japan and Truk), was sent to Sorong in western New Guinea with orders to search for and attack Allied invasion forces. The flotilla, in order to conserve its strength, was not to attack the area south-west of New Guinea, but merely to protect and man the air bases there. Some aircraft of the flotilla took part in the defence of Hollandia when Kenney made his attacks at the end of March.[3]

The plan of attack for operation RECKLESS called for simultaneous landings at Hollandia and Aitape. Lieut-General Robert Eichelberger was given command of the Hollandia task force and Brigadier-General Jens Doe of the Aitape one. Airfield construction work, always important in the Pacific war, was vital in the Hollandia-Aitape operation because of the great distance from the nearest Allied airfields. It was therefore essential that the engineers, with their equipment, should land with the infantry and begin work even while the guns were firing.

In March, Major-General Hugh J. Casey, chief engineer at General Headquarters, asked Wing Commander Dale, commander of No. 62 Works Wing, R.A.A.F., if he would take charge of all engineering projects in the Aitape operation. Dale accepted and was given command not only of the Australian works wing but all American engineer units assigned, including three army aviation battalions, an engineer battalion and a shore battalion.[4] Dale's squadrons had almost completed their tasks at Nadzab where they had done excellent work not only on Newton Field, but on another airfield and in road-making, and the construction of 250 buildings.

Dale's task did not appear to be an easy one. His men had first to reach the airfield and then repair it ready for the operation of fighter aircraft the day after the landing. The lack of adequate roads, airfields, ports and other facilities in New Guinea together with the rapidity of the advance was placing a tremendous burden on the engineering resources at Mac-

[3] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials,* Vol II, pp. 287-9: Capt H. Komoto.

[4] Of the total personnel in the Hollandia-Aitape operation 41 per cent were engineers. At Aitape the proportion of engineers employed in the early stages of the operation was higher even than this figure.

Arthur's disposal. Not only was S.W.P.A. short of the engineering units needed but there were shortages of certain critical materials, such as sawn timber and roofing. Consequently construction had to be cut to its barest essentials.

Dale set up a temporary headquarters at Finschhafen alongside the headquarters of the Sixth Army.[5] Here his force practised loading and unloading the vessels which would take them and their equipment to the beachhead. Two of the construction squadrons (Nos. 6 and 7) had been in the tropics for sixteen months without leave and although these men were tired compared with the fresher American units, they could not be relieved.

From North-Western Area, Air Vice-Marshal Cole's R.A.A.F. and American squadrons were to give indirect support to the operation. They were to "attack hostile air installations in the Arafura Sea and western New Guinea with special emphasis on airfields in the Kai Islands and the vicinity of Geelvink Bay", and also "to harass enemy installations bordering on the Timor Sea".

In the early planning of the operation No. 10 Group aircraft were given no direct part. From Cape Gloucester this group as well as No. 9 were to continue to support the operations in New Britain. General Whitehead had decided to establish one group of fighters at Aitape and three groups of fighters and one squadron of night fighters at Hollandia, but he selected Fifth Air Force squadrons. The American No. 49 Group was to go with the assault force to Aitape.

However, at the end of March, there was a change of fortune for No. 10 Group. General MacArthur signalled to General Krueger on 30th March that it would be desirable that No. 78 Wing R.A.A.F. should be substituted for the No. 49 Group. "The reason for this change of plan," he said, "is a desire to place in the Aitape and Hollandia areas the maximum number of P-40 (Kittyhawk) aircraft, which are more adapted to operate with minimum facilities." No. 49 Group (less Nos. 9 and 35 Squadrons) would follow No. 78 Wing to Hollandia as an additional group.

The news that No. 78 Wing was to take part in an amphibious operation against a reputedly defended beachhead caused a lifting of spirits in No. 10 Group. The group had suffered a setback when Kenney ordered the withdrawal of the Vengeance aircraft and the rest of the group had been left "out on a limb" at Cape Gloucester where they supported the final stages of the New Britain operations of the 1st Marine Division. These operations were unspectacular, and the opportunity of engaging in an operation directly against the enemy was keenly anticipated by both pilots and ground personnel.

Air Commodore Scherger was appointed air task commander for the Aitape operation. The ground echelons of the three Kittyhawk squadrons

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[5] His staff included Capt Howard Mullens, executive officer; W Cdr G. J. Towers (Windsor, Vic), operations officer; Sqn Ldr L. N. Jamieson, engineer officer; and Lt Aaron Kurnitsky, supply officer.

together with the men of the Australian airfield construction squadrons would follow immediately in the wake of the assault forces.

The Kittyhawks' activities at Nadzab and Cape Gloucester had, by the end of March, involved them in a high total of flying hours with the result that many machines were in need of maintenance, and, unless this work could be carried out rapidly, there would not be enough serviceable aircraft for Aitape. A conference was called at No. 10 Group to discuss the problem and Squadron Leader Taylor, commander of No. 11 Repair and Salvage Unit, was told that it was up to him to get the Kittyhawks ready in time. Taylor's unit had left the mainland equipped to handle Vengeance and Beaufort aircraft rather than Kittyhawks. Nevertheless he and his 400 men threw themselves eagerly into the task and worked two shifts of twelve hours each day. Taylor had floodlights installed for night work and he himself toured Nadzab in a jeep encouraging his men and "scrounging" spare parts to keep them employed. Brigadier-General Wurtsmith, commander of the Fifth Air Force Fighter Command, gave him twelve Allison engines and these, together with the work of his enthusiastic repair teams, enabled No. 78 Wing to make good its deficiencies in serviceable aircraft with another thirty-six machines in reserve. Scherger expected losses of up to 30 per cent of his machines during the early stages of the action and it was essential to have a reserve. During April the Kittyhawk pilots shuttled their machines back and forth between Nadzab and Cape Gloucester. At Nadzab No. 11 Repair and Salvage Unit re-conditioned twenty-eight aircraft within the month.

Meanwhile, on 8th April, at Admiral Nimitz's request, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock had been asked to provide Catalina aircraft to lay mines in the Caroline Islands. The Catalinas were to mine Woleai atoll, the aim being to prevent its use by vessels of the Japanese fleet during the Hollandia operation. Bostock directed Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons to carry out the task, and eight Catalinas from these squadrons flew independently from Cairns via Milne Bay to Manus in the Admiralty Islands, where on 13th April they moored at the American seaplane base in Lombrum Bay. Thirty-eight officers and seventy-five men of the Catalina squadrons were given quarters aboard the U.S.S. *Tangier, San Pablo* and *Heron*. On the night of 15th-16th April five of the aircraft took off from Manus and laid ten mines in the entrance to the Woleai atoll. Another plane developed engine trouble during take-off by which time it was too late to transfer the crew to a spare machine. An enemy float-plane took off from the airfield at Woleai and made several passes at one of the Catalinas. The captain, Squadron Leader Lawrence,[6] took evasive action and managed to escape a long burst of tracer bullets fired by the float-plane.

Next day the water in Lombrum Bay was too rough for the Catalinas to take off, but on the night of 17th-18th April seven machines laid another ten mines in the entrance channel at Woleai. Japanese anti-aircraft guns and rifles fired on them but scored no hits. On the return flight to

[6] Sqn Ldr D. R. Lawrence, DFC, 402164. 201, 20 and 11 Sqns; comd 11 Sqn 1945. Clerk; of Ashfield, NSW; b. Sydney, 13 Nov 1914.

Manus, however, one Catalina rose to 5,000 feet and at that altitude was passing over the American naval task force on its way to the rendezvous with MacArthur's Hollandia assault force. Anti-aircraft gunners opened fire heavily and several of the Catalina's control wires were shot away. The gun fire also made 130 holes in the mainplane but there were no casualties and the aircraft reached Manus safely where the damage was repaired by the crew of the U.S.S. *Tangier*.

Again on the night of the 18th-19th April six Catalinas flew to Woleai and dropped more mines. After sowing its mines one Catalina of No. 20 Squadron, captained by Flight Lieutenant Ham,[7] rose from 300 feet to 2,500 feet to take photographs. It dropped a flare which exploded too soon, however, revealing the Catalina against a background of white cloud. The Japanese gunners immediately found the range of the aircraft and opened fire. One Bofors shell struck a blister and exploded killing two gunners, Sergeants Phillips[8] and Ely,[9] and severely wounding Flying Officer Lachal,[1] an Intelligence officer who had gone on the mission as an observer. The Catalina reached base where the damage was repaired. During these missions the Catalina captains found that the mines sometimes hung up because of faults in the release gear. One captain was forced to make eleven runs to drop his mines.

At the request of Admiral King, the British Eastern Fleet carried out an air and surface attack on northern Sumatra in mid-April with the object of pinning down Japanese air and surface forces in the Singapore area while MacArthur's forces moved in to the assault on Hollandia.[2]

During the month of April the Fifth Air Force had been bombarding the north New Guinea coastal bases from Madang through Hansa Bay, Aitape and Hollandia in preparation for the attack on 22nd April. On 10th April they dropped 227 tons on Hansa Bay, on the 12th 251 tons on the same target, and on the 12th 322 tons on Hollandia. The bombardment of Tadji began on 15th April when 131 bombers dropped 180 tons in a series of attacks lasting three hours. The following day 32 aircrew and 31 aircraft were lost when low clouds and fog moved inland and blanketed the airfields at Nadzab and Gusap before aircraft which had again attacked Aitape could get back to their bases.

From 17th to 21st April the Fifth Air Force concentrated on coast defences at Hollandia, while Liberators of No. 380 Bomber Group operating from the Northern Territory hit targets farther west at Noemfoor, Utarom, Manokwari and other airfields which the Japanese might use for launching bomber attacks.

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[7] F-Lt E. C. Ham, 23312. 20 and 11 Sqns, and 113 ASR Flight. Clerk; of East Brisbane; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 16 Dec 1921.

[8] Sgt N. C. Phillips, 27770; 20 Sqn. Fitter and turner; of Broken Hill, NSW; b. Broken Hill, 26 Sep 1921. Killed in action 19 Apr 1944.

[9] Sgt R. C. Ely, 419301; 20 Sqn. Cabinet maker; of Newmarket, Vic; b. Toorak, Vic, 6 Oct 1916. Killed in action 19 Apr 1944.

[1] F-O P. J. Lachal, 128264. 2/2 AA Regt AIF 1940-43; 9 and 11 Sqns. Clerk; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. South Melbourne, 12 May 1918.

[2] Vice Admiral the Earl of Mountbatten, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia, 1943-1945* (1951).

On 17th April 800 R.A.A.F. men and the equipment of No. 78 Wing left Cape Gloucester on two ships en route for Aitape. They joined the main convoy which left Cape Cretin, near Finschhafen, the following day. The convoy included naval escorts, Liberty ships and escort aircraft carriers. Three landings all of similar strengths would be made (two at Hollandia and one at Aitape). The force for the Aitape landing included, in addition to the 163rd Regimental Combat Team of the 41st American Division, some 2,500 engineer and construction troops under Dale. Scherger, with Group Captain Candy,[3] acting senior air staff officer of the group (in place of Group Captain Pearce, who had suffered an attack of malaria) accompanied Brigadier-General Doe on the American destroyer *Nicholas*.

The convoy, carrying 30,000 combat and service troops, was the biggest assembled in the South-West Pacific up to that time. To deceive the enemy as to the Allied objective, the convoy, after passing through Vitiaz Strait, headed due north to the Admiralty Islands. During the 19th April, while it was moving through the Bismarck Sea on the way to the Admiralties, fifty-four Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing gave it some protection by carrying out air patrols. Ten of No. 75 Squadron's Kittyhawks, led by Squadron Leader Kinninmont, were unable to return to Cape Gloucester after carrying out this duty because of bad weather over the Cape Gloucester airfield, and were forced to land at Saidor. The weather cleared next day, however, and they returned to Cape Gloucester. Apart from this, the task of convoy protection was without incident. Off the Admiralty Islands the convoy was joined by the fast carriers of the American Fifth Fleet. The Kittyhawks and Spitfires of No. 73 Wing, operating from Momote, took over the task of convoy protection as the convoy steamed north to the Admiralties. Again there was little incident.

On 20th April the armada, comprising some eighty vessels, headed north-west from the Admiralties and during the night of 21st April the ships destined for Aitape separated from the main convoy. At dawn next day this force reached the bay near the intended point of landing. The naval escort heavily bombarded the coastline and near-by islands, while carrier-based aircraft machine-gunned the Tadji airfield and anti-aircraft positions from Aitape to Korako village. No enemy aircraft attempted to interfere.

At 6.45 a.m. the first wave of the assault troops landed near the Lemieng villages without opposition except for sporadic rifle and machine-gun fire. The troops were put ashore about one mile from the spot chosen by the planners, and killed or took prisoner about fifty Javanese labour coolies and several Japanese soldiers. The enemy was caught by surprise, the bombardment by the naval escorts being their first warning of the invasion. Enemy troops, who were mainly from base and service units, left their breakfasts in their hurry to get away. No defences had been

[3] AVM C. D. Candy, CBE. Comd 206 Sqn RAF 1941, 6(C) OTU RAF 1941-42, 1 OTU 1942-43, 71 Wing 1943, 74 Wing 1943-44; SASO 10 Gp 1944; RAAF Cd 1945. Regular air force offr; of East St Kilda, Vic; b. East St Kilda, 17 Sep 1912.

prepared and the invaders found anti-aircraft guns and rifles packed away in crates. Landing at the wrong position proved to be advantageous to the invaders because the L.S.T's were able to beach, whereas at the planned landing place they would have had to use pontoons to cross from the sand bar to the beach.

At 7 a.m. Dale, Jamieson[4] and a small detachment of No. 13 Survey and Design Unit waded ashore with the fourth wave. They were followed a half hour later by the headquarters of No. 62 Works Wing, the main party of No. 13 Survey and Design Unit, No. 22 Medical Clearing Station and No. 7 Mobile Works Squadron, commanded by Flight Lieutenant Barlow.[5]

By noon the infantry had occupied the northern airstrip at Tadji and the engineers began surveying and pegging. Dale found that the airfield surface was overgrown with kunai grass, only roughly graded and too short for fighter operations. Rain had begun to fall soon after the landing and this made the topsoil difficult to work. In spite of the difficulties, however, No. 7 Squadron began grading and extending the strip at 3 p.m. There was little shooting to interfere with the work. In two days American casualties were three killed and eight missing; no R.A.A.F. men were lost.

Meanwhile, at Hollandia, Nimitz's carriers had launched their aircraft at dawn to support the landings. Again the enemy had been surprised. It had been thought that the Allied landing would be costly, but the troops advanced practically unopposed after fleeing Japanese had abandoned their breakfast rice bowls. Staff estimates had expected about 14,000 enemy troops but the entire garrison was found to be only 5,000 unwilling troops who quickly melted away. No hostile naval attacks or air raids in force came from any direction. The Japanese search aircraft which patrolled the New Guinea coast did not see the convoy until after it had anchored.[6] Operation RECKLESS had succeeded beyond the most optimistic expectations.

MacArthur's communiqué of 24th April announcing the landing stated:

> Our feints over the past weeks towards Madang and Wewak apparently deceived the enemy, thus leaving the vital sector of Hollandia vulnerable and making possible our surprise movement to his rear. The operation throws a loop of envelopment around the enemy's *XVIII Army* dispersed along the coast of New Guinea in the Madang, Hansa Bay and Wewak sectors, similar to the Solomons and Bismarck loops of envelopment. To the east are the Australians and the Americans; to the west the Americans; to the north, the sea controlled by Allied naval forces; to the south untraversed jungle mountain ranges and, over all, Allied air mastery.

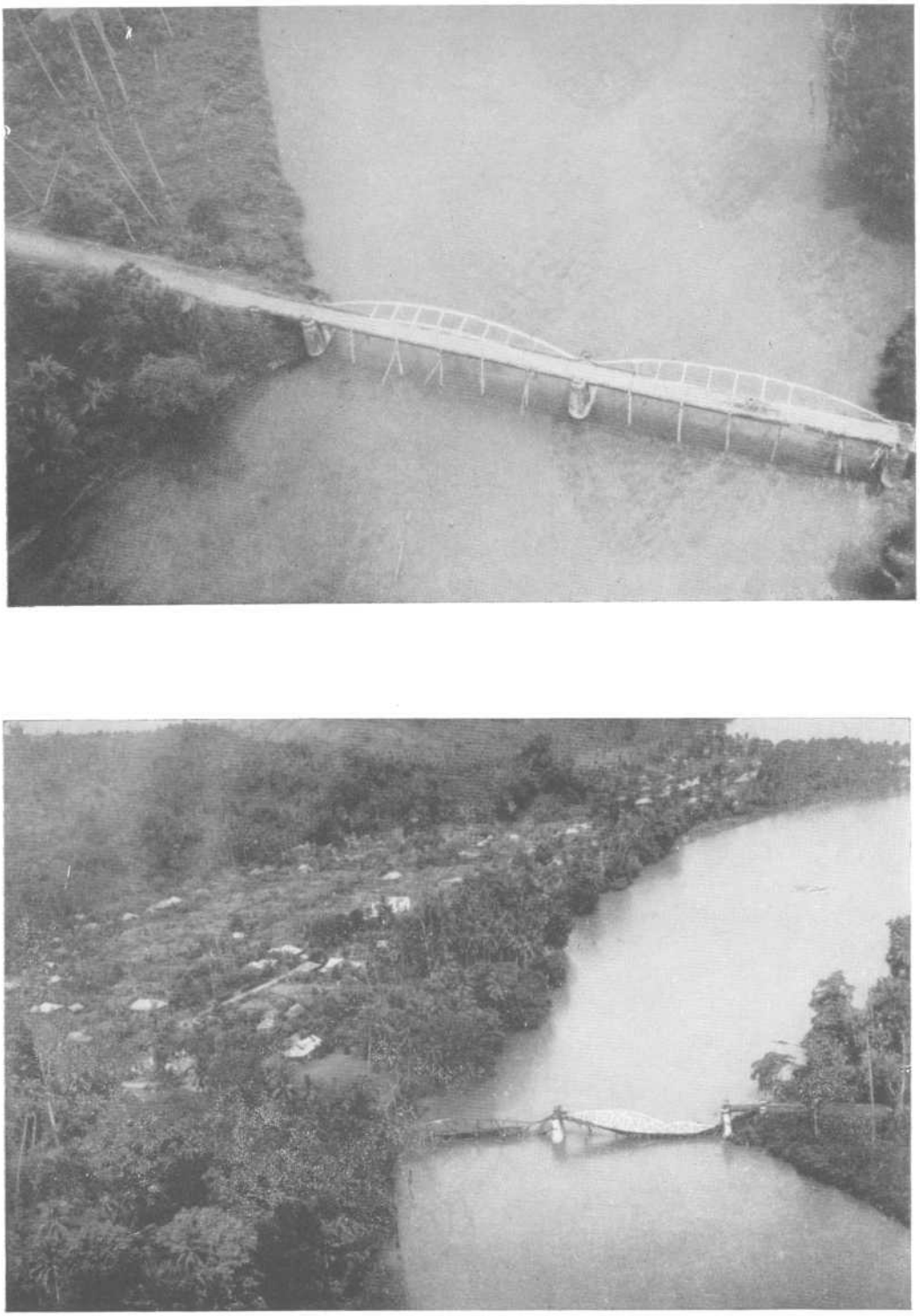
At Aitape on the 23rd further R.A.A.F. reinforcements arrived. The headquarters of No. 10 Group and No. 78 Wing landed, together with the ground staffs and equipment of Nos. 75, 78 and 80 Squadrons. No. 62 Works Wing was also reinforced on this day by the arrival of No. 5

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[4] Sqn Ldr L. N. Jamieson, 263926. Comd 13 SDU 1943-44. Civil engineer; of Coogee, NSW; b. Melbourne, 20 Apr 1904.

[5] Sqn Ldr G. W. Barlow, 275708. Comd 7 Mobile Works Sqn 1944, 4 AC Sqn 1944-45. Civil engineer; of Kingaroy, Qld; b. Brisbane, 14 Mar 1904.

[6] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations*, Vol II, p. 289: Capt Komoto.



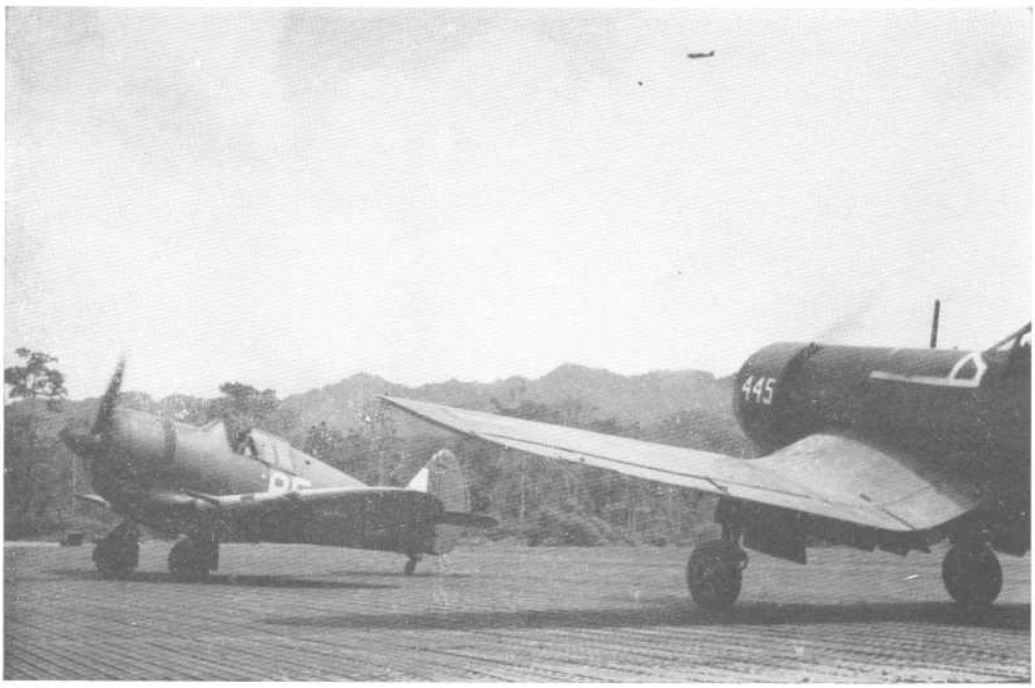
*(R.A.A.F.)*

The bridge across the Rangiapo River, north-east Celebes, before and after it was attacked by Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron on 27th December 1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Australian senior officers of the combined Services after a conference at Torokina, on Bougainville Island, on 19th January 1945. Left to right: Lt-Col A. Binnie, Air Cmdre F. W. Lukis, Capt J. C. D. Esdaile, R.A.N., and Gp Capt W. L. Hely.




*(R.A.A.F.)*

Boomerangs of No. 5 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron at Torokina testing their engines in preparation for taking off to lead in a flight of R.N.Z.A.F. Corsairs on a strike against Japanese concentrations on 15th January 1945.

Works Squadron, commanded by Flight Lieutenant Edwards,[7] No. 6 Works Squadron, commanded by Flight Lieutenant Farran,[8] and detachments of No. 4 Works Maintenance Unit and No. 10 Works Supply Unit. The men of these units began work immediately in spite of sporadic sniper fire, but it proved impossible to get the airfield ready for use by the end of the second day. This delay did not affect the situation, however, since the expected enemy air attacks did not come. The engineers worked all night and by 8 a.m. on the 24th the fighter strip on which steel matting 100 feet wide and 3,900 feet long had been laid, was ready for use. The engineers had taken 41 hours since work began. At 9.45 a.m. two American Lightnings, one flown by Brigadier-General Wurtsmith, landed on the runway. They were the first Allied planes to use it and they were followed in the afternoon by twenty Kittyhawks of No. 78 Squadron led in by Pearce in a Beaufort. After refuelling, four of the Kittyhawks took off again and patrolled until dusk over the airfield, but without meeting any enemy. The Kittyhawk pilots who thus began operations from an airfield which had been in enemy hands two days earlier, had to operate under primitive conditions. Maintenance crews had to do their work in the open.

On 25th April twenty-three aircraft of No. 78 took off from Aitape and patrolled the beachhead at Hollandia. Aitape was difficult to work from and two of the Kittyhawks crashed when landing after the patrol but the pilots were uninjured. Next day heavy rain fell preventing the use of the airfield and impeding construction work. The first Japanese air opposition to the landing came on 27th April when, at 11 p.m., a twin-engined bomber made a surprise masthead attack in drizzling rain on a Liberty ship which, although hit on No. 5 hold, did not sink.

No. 78 had been unable to fly again until 29th April because of the weather, but that day two details of twelve aircraft patrolled over Hollandia and two details of four aircraft over Aitape. On this day Scherger called another twenty-two Kittyhawks of No. 80 Squadron forward from Cape Gloucester where the pilots had been awaiting the word to go. They joined No. 78 Squadron in patrolling over Tadji and Hollandia.

On 30th April, in addition to carrying out fifty-three patrol sorties, five aircraft went to machine-gun the villages of Kamti and Sagaro and the tracks in the area. American troops entering Kamti village next day sent a message to the R.A.A.F. telling them that, with the exception of two huts, the village had been demolished and seventy-five enemy dead had been counted there.

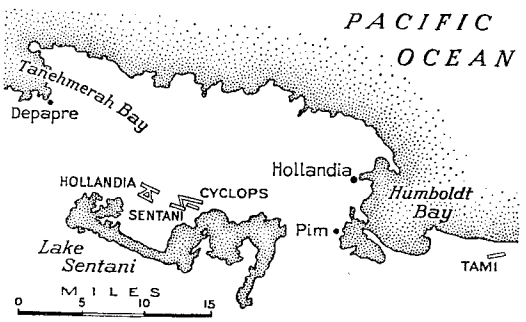
Meanwhile at Hollandia the Sentani and Cyclops airfields had been seized by troops of the 41st Division and thereafter ground action was limited to hunting down scattered Japanese remnants. On 27th April work had begun on the repair of Cyclops airfield and it was ready for use

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[7] Sqn Ldr J. N. Edwards, 265105. 1 Mobile Works Sqn; comd 5 Works Sqn 1943-44, 5 AC Sqn 1945. Civil engineer; of Balmoral, NSW; b. Kalgoorlie, WA, 25 Dec 1909.

[8] Sqn Ldr D. C. Farran, 253867. Comd 6 AC Sqn 1944-45. Civil engineer; of Horsham, Vic; b. Melbourne, 12 Apr 1907.

next day. When the ground troops had taken all three Hollandia airfields they counted a total of 340 wrecked and burnt out Japanese aircraft.[9] The enemy had not only lost these aircraft but many others shot down in the surrounding area. Prisoners told interrogators that Allied aircraft besides destroying all the planes and petrol stocks at Hollandia had killed about 2,000 of the ground crews and other service troops.[1] By the time Hollandia was lost by the Japanese practically all the aircraft of the *6th Air Division* had been destroyed. The remainder were transferred to the *7th Air Division* with headquarters at Ambon. This division continued to operate about 100 aircraft in the western New Guinea-Celebes areas.




Supply to American troops in the Hollandia area had become difficult because of the destruction of a food dump by a Japanese bomb and also because the road between the beach at Pim and the airfields where the troops were concentrated had become impassable after heavy rains. It was necessary to drop additional food supplies by parachute until the Cyclops airfield was repaired. Kenney's transport planes shuttled back and forth from Nadzab carrying food and other supplies. The R.A.A.F. at Aitape had to keep open the air lane from Nadzab to Hollandia so that the air transports would not be molested by Japanese raiders. In the early part of May escorting these transports was one of No. 10 Group's main activities. All patrols and escort missions from Aitape were carried out without a single enemy aircraft being seen.

On 7th May sixteen Kittyhawks of No. 78 led by Squadron Leader Brydon,[2] flew to Hollandia taking their own rations for four days because of the critical food shortage at Hollandia. The pilots slept in hammocks under the wings of their aircraft, and five details each of eight aircraft, on each of the three following days carried out patrols over Hollandia. There were still no clashes with enemy aircraft. The Kittyhawks returned to Aitape on 10th May. Until the middle of May the Kittyhawks maintained their patrolling from Aitape and continually raided enemy motor transports and anti-aircraft positions, and fired on enemy soldiers along the coast in the Wewak area.

Wing Commander Brookes and the headquarters of No. 78 Wing moved to Cyclops on 12th and 13th May followed by the aircraft of Nos. 78

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[9] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II* (1950), Vol IV, p. 598.

[1] Kenney, p. 392.

[2] Sqn Ldr A. H. Brydon, DFC, 578. 1 and 107 Sqns; Comd 78 Sqn 1944. Regular air force offr; of Armidale, NSW; b. Armidale, 14 Apr 1921.

and 80 Squadrons. These two squadrons were then released to the operational control of the commanding officer of No. 310 Bombardment Wing of the Fifth Air Force, and were to take part in the Wakde-Biak operations then impending. No. 75 Squadron in the meantime had flown to Aitape from Cape Gloucester and was to begin operations from Tadji.

While No. 10 Group moved with the spearhead of the Allied advance to Hollandia-Aitape, R.A.A.F. Command carried on an air war from the Northern Territory, which, though it appeared to be independent, was indirectly supporting the main New Guinea drive.

General Kenney's orders to R.A.A.F. Command for the support of the Hollandia-Aitape operations were:

1. Attack hostile air installations in the Arafura Sea and western New Guinea, with special emphasis on airfields in the Kai Islands and the vicinity of Geelvink Bay.
2. Conduct long-range bomber and mining attacks against Netherlands East Indies within range with special emphasis on Balikpapan.
3. Harass enemy installations bordering on the Timor Sea.

Tasks one and two (except the mining operations) were to be carried out by the American No. 380 Group which was still in the Northern Territory, while task three and the mining operations were assigned to the R.A.A.F. squadrons of North-Western and North-Eastern Areas.

Kenney had also planned an amphibious operation to Selaru Island some 250 miles north of Darwin. The reason behind this was the need to increase the range of bombers (both Australian and American) in the North-Western Area. The Japanese airfield on the island would be seized and fighter aircraft based there to protect it. The runway would then be extended and improved so that it could be used by bombers.

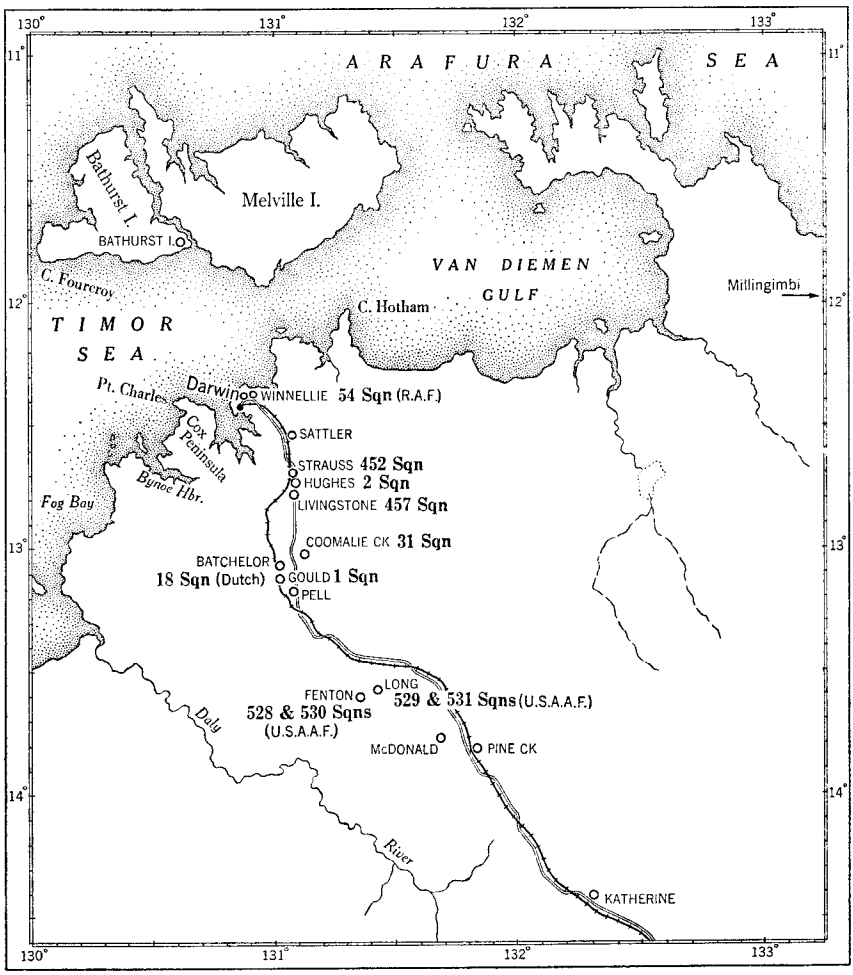
MacArthur was opposed to this operation for the time being, but told Kenney to go ahead with the planning "as he might want to carry that operation out if anything went wrong at Hollandia or the Japanese decided to put too much strength on the north coast of Dutch New Guinea for us to handle".[3]

Early in March Bostock had issued a tentative outline plan for the air support of the operation. The R.A.A.F. was to provide an air task force of two wings complete with ancillary units. The wings would be fighter wings, one armed with Spitfires and the other with Kittyhawks. Two additional R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons (Nos. 548 and 549) which had been formed at Strathpine, Queensland, in December 1943 and were then in training, would be sent to Darwin to release Nos. 452 and 457 Squadrons for the task force. However, by April the operation had not gone farther than the planning stage.

Kenney had been anxious also that some of the new American very-long-range bombers (the B-29, Superfortress) should be based at Darwin for the bombardment of the important Balikpapan oil refineries. He

[3] Kenney, p. 384.

directed the R.A.A.F. to prepare a 10,000-foot runway at Darwin to take these machines and the work was put in hand by No. 61 Mobile Works Wing. However, in the meantime, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had decided not to allot any of the Superfortresses to the South-West Pacific. They pointed out that the Sumatran oil refineries would be a more lucrative target than Balikpapan, and, in any case, the Japanese would be cut off from oil in the Netherlands East Indies as soon as the Philippine




Islands and Formosa had been occupied by the forces under MacArthur and Nimitz. Moreover, it was considered that direct air bombardment of Japan from the Mariana Islands, which were to be seized, "will not only cause direct damage to Japan's war-making capacity, but may also

produce far-reaching effects on the Japanese public and result in a decrease in enemy air strength in combat areas in order to build up the defences of Japan proper".

General Arnold agreed with the conclusions of the U.S. Joint Chiefs. He wanted the maximum number of Superfortresses used for the strategic bombardment of Japan proper. He wrote later:

> To end the war as quickly as possible, it was essential that we use such power as was available to carry out our major objective, which was to mass the maximum number of heavy bombers possible for the destruction of interior Germany, and in due course mass the maximum number of Superfortresses for the destruction of Japan. MacArthur yelled for the B-29's; Nimitz wanted the B-29's; Stilwell and Mountbatten wanted the B-29's—all for tactical purposes.[4]

In March there had been some dislocation of air effort in North-Western Area as a result of the emergency air reinforcement of Western Area following the arrival of Japanese aircraft carriers at Singapore. The effort of No. 380 Group had also been reduced when two squadrons were sent to New Guinea to support the invasion of Los Negros. However, by the end of March all squadrons had returned and settled down again. In addition, two more Australian squadrons, No. 1 (Beauforts) and No. 43 (Catalinas) had been assigned to North-Western Area control. Air Vice-Marshal Cole now had the following thirteen squadrons at his disposal, as well as No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit which continued to carry out vital missions over enemy airfields:[5]

Australia

- No. 1 (Squadron Leader Campbell), general-reconnaissance bombers, equipped with Beauforts, based at Gould.
- No. 2 (Squadron Leader Ingram[6]), general-reconnaissance bombers, equipped with Beauforts, based at Hughes.
- No. 31 (Wing Commander Mann), long-range fighters, equipped with Beaufighters, based at Coomalie.
- No. 43 (Wing Commander Thompson[7]), long-range minelaying, equipped with Catalinas, based in Darwin harbour.
- No. 83 (Squadron Leader Goon[8]), fighters, equipped with Boomerangs, based at Gove.
- No. 452 (Squadron Leader Spence[9]), fighters, equipped with Spitfires, based at Strauss.
- No. 457 (Squadron Leader Trimble[1]), fighters, equipped with Spitfires, based at Livingstone.

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[4] H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 541.

[5] The principal appointments at NW Area headquarters at the end of March were: AVM A. T. Cole, AOC; Gp Capt A. M. Murdoch, SASO; Gp Capt M. O. Watson, SOA; Sqn Ldr S. Jamieson, Intelligence Officer. No. 1 (Fighter) Wing (which controlled Nos. 54, 452 and 457 Sqns) was commanded by Gp Capt P. Jeffrey; No. 79 Wing (controlling Nos. 1, 2, 18 and 31 Sqns) by Gp Capt C. Eaton; No. 61 Mobile Works Wing by W Cdr D. J. Rooney; and No. 380 American Gp by Lt-Col Forrest L. Brissey Jr.

[6] W Cdr L. A. Ingram, 379. 14, 13 and 100 Sqns; comd 2 Sqn 1944. Regular air force offr; of Geelong, Vic; b. Essendon, Vic, 1 Apr 1917.

[7] W Cdr C. F. Thompson, DFC, 260286. 20 and 11 Sqns; comd 43 Sqn 1943-44; Liaison duties 1 TAF 1944-45. Of Sydney; b. Waverley, NSW, 31 Aug 1916.

[8] Sqn Ldr R. F. Goon, 251686. 34, 24 and 85 Sqns; comd 83 Sqn 1944-45. Flying instructor; of Essendon, Vic; b. 22 Sep 1913.

[9] W Cdr L. T. Spence, DFC, 270839. 3 Sqn; comd 452 Sqn 1944, 8 OTU 1945. Comd 77 Sqn, Korea, 1950. Bank clerk; of Longreach, Qld; b. Bundaberg, Qld, 4 Apr 1917. Killed in action, Korea, 9 Sep 1950.

[1] Sqn Ldr T. H. Trimble, 260652. 21, 25, and 3 Sqns; RAAF Hq, Washington; comd 457 Sqn 1944-45. Clerk; of Cremorne, NSW; b. Mosman, NSW, 1 Aug 1920.

United Kingdom
No. 54 (Squadron Leader Newton[2]), fighters, equipped with Spitfires, based at Darwin.

United States
No. 528 (Captain Banks), heavy bombers, equipped with Liberators, based at Fenton.
No. 529 (Captain Craig), heavy bombers, equipped with Liberators, based at Long.
No. 530 (Captain Cesario), heavy bombers, equipped with Liberators, based at Fenton.
No. 531 (Captain Seale), heavy bombers, equipped with Liberators, based at Long.

Holland
No. 18 (Lieut-Colonel te Roller), medium bombers, equipped with Mitchells, based at Batchelor.

After their return from Potshot airfield, Exmouth Gulf, the Beaufighters had been hunting for enemy vessels in the islands north of Darwin and had excellent results. On 28th March six of these aircraft, led by Squadron Leader Burlace,[3] struck in the waters around Roti Island south-west of Timor. The Beaufighters flew first from Coomalie to Drysdale airfield where they refuelled and took off again for Roti, approaching at a very low altitude in the last 150 miles. At the head of Pepela Bay they discovered and immediately attacked five 30-foot prahus. One of the Beaufighters (Flight Lieutenant Fitton,[4] pilot, and Flight Sergeant Foyle,[5] navigator) flew so low in the attack that it struck the mast of a prahu on the beach. The Beaufighter crashed and exploded and then burst into flames, killing the crew.

On 31st March the Beaufighters again staged through the base at Drysdale to attack Tenau harbour, Timor. The Beaufighters carried 250-lb bombs with which they made an early-morning attack on an oil barge and a 500-ton vessel which was hit and left burning. This vessel was destroyed and the Beaufighters continued to pour cannon and machine-gun fire into other small vessels they found off Semau Island. On 6th April they attacked again at Semau Island setting fire to a 100-foot oil barge and destroying buildings ashore. On this mission Flying Officer Strachan's[6] machine was hit by anti-aircraft fire and he was compelled to crash-land on Cartier Island, a tiny atoll south of Semau. He and his navigator were rescued uninjured some hours later by a Catalina.

In accordance with the general support plan for the Hollandia-Aitape assault, the bombardment effort of North-Western Area in April was directed against bases that might be used to stage enemy aircraft against

[2] Sqn Ldr R. B. Newton, DFC, 88464, RAF. 411 Sqn RAF; attached RAAF 1942; comd 54 Sqn RAF 1944. B. Preston, Lancs, England, 4 Jul 1915.

[3] Sqn Ldr C. H. Burlace, 262044; 31 Sqn. Flying instructor; of Broadmeadow, NSW; b. Mosman, NSW, 20 Nov 1911.

[4] F-Lt K. A. Fitton, 403730; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of Kogarah, NSW; b. Kogarah, 2 Oct 1916. Killed in action 28 Mar 1944.

[5] F-Sgt R. C. Foyle, 410970; 31 Sqn. Munition worker; of Warrnambool, Vic; b. Warrnambool, 15 May 1921. Killed in action 28 Mar 1944.

[6] F-Lt D. B. F. Strachan, 401862; 31 and 94 Sqns. Student; of Caulfield, Vic; b. Paddington, NSW, 25 Aug 1921.

the beachheads. Before 17th April Cole was to attack mainly the Kai Islands airfields from which it would be possible for the Japanese to launch bombers against the American carrier force. From 18th to 19th April the attack was to be shifted to airfields and airfield installations at Manokwari and Babo in Dutch New Guinea, and from 20th to 24th April Noemfoor was the main target. In order that Cole would be able to keep up a maximum effort he was permitted to reduce his reconnaissance duties to a minimum.

No. 380 Group struck Langgur airfield in the Kai group on 3rd and 7th April flying a total of fifty-six sorties. After these raids Bostock signalled to Cole that examination of photographs taken afterwards showed that little or no damage had been done and that it was useless to bomb the airfields when there were no aircraft present. He directed Cole to try and destroy stores concentrations at the airfields.

Meanwhile Group Captain Eaton's No. 79 Wing were daily bombing Timor. A stream of Beauforts of No. 2 Squadron and Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron visited Koepang, Lautem, Penfui and Dili. No. 1 Squadron, after becoming partly operational on 20th March, joined in this bombardment early in April. Squadron Leader Campbell led a strike of three Beauforts of this squadron against Lautem on the night of 4th April. All three machines found the target and their bombs fell in the allotted target area. On 15th April the Beaufighters raided Su village on Timor destroying buildings with bombs and machine-gunning Japanese, some of whom were killed. Return fire from the ground hit several of the Beaufighters and one crashed into the sea forty miles south of Timor.

In company with No. 18 Squadron, No. 1 Squadron took part in a large-scale raid on Koepang that night. Two Mitchells of the Dutch squadron, carrying incendiary bombs, acted as "pathfinders", arriving over the target just after nightfall. The incendiary bombs started fires in the area, guiding the Beauforts, which had staged from Gould through Drysdale. Campbell's machine was first over Koepang after the pathfinders. He saw the fires and dropped his bombs from 7,400 feet. Ten other Beauforts of No. 1 followed him and then the remaining Mitchells bombed. Photographs taken after the attack showed that twenty-six buildings were either damaged or destroyed, including the warehouses along the foreshore.

The Liberators heavily bombed the Kai Islands on 17th April and on the 18th switched their attacks to Manokwari and Mumi airfields in Dutch New Guinea. On this day also eleven Spitfires drawn from Nos. 54, 452 and 457 Squadrons and two Beaufighters of No. 31 attacked a village on Babar Island. Group Captain Jeffrey led the operation which was the first attack on a ground target by the Spitfires from the Darwin area. The pilots left their bases at first light and flew first to the newly-constructed airstrip on Bathurst Island where they refuelled. They approached their targets at a height of fifty feet. Led by a Beaufighter, they machine-gunned huts and barges at Wetan Island then the village of Tepa and a Japanese wireless station on Babar, scoring hits which caused damage. All the aircraft returned safely without meeting any hostile fire.

Eaton planned a heavy daylight attack by the Beauforts and Mitchells against Su. For some time there had been no sign of enemy fighter aircraft in the Timor area, but to give bombers some protection in this first daylight operation, No. 31 Beaufighters were ordered to provide top cover. This raid was to be made on 19th April, three days before the landings at Hollandia and Aitape. No. 1 Squadron provided fifteen Beauforts, No. 18 provided twelve Mitchells and No. 31 provided eight Beaufighters. The object was to strike at the Su barracks and town area. The Beauforts took off from Darwin at 7.45 a.m. and an hour later rendezvoused with the Mitchells and Beaufighters. The three squadrons then flew in formation at 10,000 feet with the Beauforts leading. As they approached Su they lost height to 8,000 feet and increased speed to 170 knots. The Beauforts bombed in line astern dropping incendiary as well as high explosive bombs. Many of these were seen to fall in the buildings, tents and dump area, starting large fires. No. 18 made its bombing run at almost the same time and all their bombs fell in the town area.

On assault day at Hollandia (22nd April) the Mitchells and Beaufighters carried out a daylight raid on Dili while twenty-four Liberators of No. 380 Group bombed Noemfoor Island. Until the end of April these attacks from the Northern Territory continued to support the main New Guinea operations. The precise effect of this bombardment on the enemy could not be determined. But, as already recorded, the advance to Hollandia-Aitape was opposed by only a few small-scale raids instead of the heavy air reaction which MacArthur's commanders expected. The widespread and continual bombardment of all enemy airfields that could be used against Hollandia-Aitape probably helped to achieve this result.

Catalinas of Nos. 11, 20 and 43 Squadrons laid mines not only at Woleai in the Carolines, but also at Balikpapan, Manokwari, Kaimana and Sorong in efforts to close enemy harbours to shipping during the Hollandia-Aitape operations. No. 43, which had not previously laid mines, was assigned the difficult task of mining Balikpapan harbour; for some months before its movement to Darwin from Karumba, in early April, the squadron had been engaged in night harassing raids. Mines had been laid at Balikpapan in February of 1944 by Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons, and No. 43's task was to replenish the minefield on 20th April, two days before the Hollandia-Aitape operation.

On 17th April the American seaplane tender *Childs* laid temporary Catalina moorings in Yampi Sound in Western Australia, which was chosen as the advanced base for the operation. Boomerang fighters of No. 85 Squadron were sent north from Western Area to give fighter protection.

Six Catalinas of No. 43, led by Thompson, took off from Yampi on the afternoon of 21st April. Over Balikpapan the aircraft met unexpectedly heavy anti-aircraft fire from vessels in the harbour. Flight Sergeant Abbey's[7] machine was hit, caught fire, and crashed in flames. Flight

[7] F-Sgt D. G. Abbey, 410135; 20 and 43 Sqns. Draftsman; of Preston, Vic; b. Preston, 15 Nov 1920. Killed in action 21 Apr 1944.

Lieutenant Gray,[8] captain of another Catalina, saw this crash and shortly after shrapnel struck his own aircraft tearing a hole in the hull. Shrapnel fragments ripped through the cockpit, wounding both Gray and his co-pilot (Flying Officer Seage[9]) in the arms. His crew blocked the hole in the cockpit with bedding and Gray headed back to Yampi Sound. As a result of the opposition and of the inexperience of the crews in minelaying this operation was not a success, numbers of mines being laid in the wrong places.

Arrangements for this minelaying operation included the use of Beaufighters of No. 31 to fly well out to sea to meet the returning Catalinas and protect them on the last stage of their flight. This was done and the Catalinas therefore had fighter protection during the daylight part of their homeward flight. Gray made a skilful landing with his damaged machine at Yampi while a crash crew supported by a fire-fighting party and first-aid team stood by. As the Catalina could not remain afloat he sent it up onto a beach.

The Catalinas returned to Balikpapan on 24th and 27th April to lay more mines. Anti-aircraft fire over the harbour was slight and nearly all mines were laid in the intended positions. They also mined Sorong on 25th April and Kaimana on 27th April. One Catalina captained by Pilot Officer Rose[1] was sent to mine Manokwari on 28th April. It did not return and no further word was heard of it. The Catalinas succeeded in disrupting Japanese shipping at Balikpapan. The harbour was closed from 20th to 29th April, and a delayed-action mine sank the destroyer *Amagiri* on 23rd April.

[8] F-Lt R. H. S. Gray, 260717; 11 and 43 Sqns. Law clerk; of Orange, NSW; b. Hughenden, Qld, 8 Apr 1915.

[9] F-Lt J. A. Seage, 406798. 43, 11, and 20 Sqns. Clerk; of Mt Lawley, WA; b. Perth, 13 Aug 1919. Killed in action 28 Jan 1945.

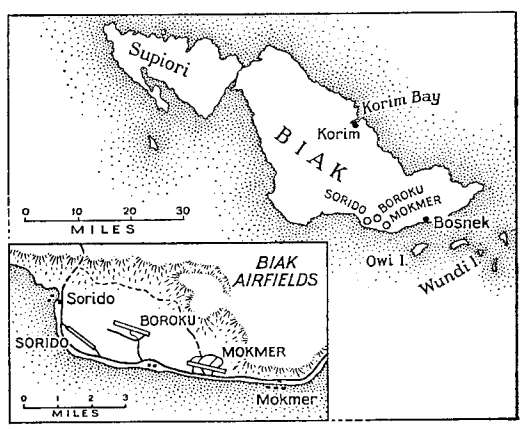
[1] P-O W. N. Rose, 400939. 14 and 11 Sqns. Salesman; of Essendon, Vic; b. Brunswick, Vic, 27 May 1921. Killed in action 28 Apr 1944.

CHAPTER 14

# OVER WAKDE AND BIAK

WITH the Hollandia-Aitape areas in his grasp, General MacArthur now prepared for further advances. The Joint Chiefs of Staff directive of 12th March called on him, after the Hollandia operation, to "conduct operations along the New Guinea coast, and such other operations as may be feasible in preparation for support of the Palau landing and the assault on Mindanao". On 22nd April, immediately after the Hollandia-Aitape assault, MacArthur directed his chief of staff to make plans to speed up the capture of Wakde Island. MacArthur said that the enemy at Hollandia-Aitape had shown "amazing weakness" and he believed "this extreme weakness exists throughout the remaining Japanese bases in northern Dutch New Guinea".

Wakde was 125 miles west of Hollandia and General Kenney had wanted to establish some of his groups there. Most of his air bases in New Guinea were now out of range of enemy targets, and Kenney needed many more airfields to bring the large air forces at his disposal into play. He intended to abandon Dobodura and Port Moresby as operational bases, and the Kiriwina, Woodlark, Goodenough and Milne Bay airfields had ceased to be of value after the capture of the Admiralty Islands. Hollandia provided additional airfields for the deployment of Allied aircraft, but it had proved disappointing as the development there was limited. Wakde would help, but enough airfield space was wanted to bring both the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces into play for later operations against the Philippines. For that reason he wanted "to keep on going and take over Biak where the Nips already had three coral runways". Wakde did not promise much in the way of airfield development but Biak did. It seemed the best place for this purpose, between Nadzab and Mindanao.




At a conference with his headquarters staff at Port Moresby on 25th April MacArthur fixed 15th May as the date for the landing at Wakde. On 7th May he directed that Biak also be seized by the Sixth Army on 27th May. Again the main purpose of this operation was to provide facilities for air and naval forces which were to be used in later opera-

tions. Biak's three airfields were at Mokmer, Boroku and Sorido; and it was the main Japanese air base between Hollandia and Halmahera.

Some reaction by the Japanese fleet was expected to follow an Allied landing at Biak even though enemy surface vessels would have to come within reach of aircraft operating from Hollandia and Wakde; strong submarine opposition was also expected. Until the airfields at Wakde and Hollandia became effective, only air forces in the Darwin area could reach bases from which the enemy might send aircraft to attack an assault force invading Biak. Even so, the enemy bases in Ambon and Halmahera would still lie beyond the range of fighter-escorted bombers and, consequently, could not be effectively bombarded.

The Fifth Air Force and Thirteenth Air Task Force (both now under General Kenney's control) were to carry out the main supporting bombardment for these two operations. Air Commodore Scherger's No. 10 Group was to supply two fighter squadrons, No. 78 led by Squadron Leader Brydon, and No. 80 led by Squadron Leader Cooper,[1] for direct support but the rest of the R.A.A.F. in New Guinea was to continue hammering the strong enemy ground forces in by-passed areas (especially those in Wewak and New Britain).

At Aitape a group of American air transports (No. 317 Group) were placed under Scherger's control. In mid-May the shortage of supplies at Hollandia was still critical, and it became necessary to use these transports to air-freight food and ammunition from Aitape. The transport pilots worked all day picking up loads from three-ton trucks which were driven up beside their aircraft. At Hollandia the food and ammunition was dumped quickly on the side of the runways. As soon as an aircraft was unloaded it returned to Aitape, and another load was placed aboard while the crew had some coffee and a "cookie". Petrol had also to be flown into Hollandia and the bombers were forced to use captured Japanese bombs because it had not been possible to bring Allied bombs forward.

Supply was also one of the greatest problems in the projected operations at Wakde-Biak, and at staff conferences the supply officers had raised objections to the speed of the advance because it would place too great a strain on the supply organisation. There were heated arguments on this question, but finally it was agreed that the landing at Biak would be carried out on 27th May as proposed.

Mass air attacks on Wakde had begun within a few days of the landing at Aitape and Hollandia. By the end of April, after American bombers had dropped 200 tons of bombs on the island, the Wakde airfield was out of action. From 1st to 17th May a further 1,500 tons of bombs were dropped. In this period Liberators of No. 380 Group were operating from the Northern Territory under Air Vice-Marshal Cole's direction against Biak, Nabire, Noemfoor, Fakfak, Babo and Manokwari, which were the main air bases in Dutch New Guinea remaining in enemy hands.

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[1] W Cdr G. A. Cooper, DFC, 251426. 23, 83 and 86 Sqns; comd 80 Sqn 1943-44; 80 Wing HQ 1945. Commercial pilot; of Adelaide; b. Hawthorn, Vic, 20 Nov 1914.

The aircraft of Nos. 78 and 80 Squadrons, which had been assigned to No. 310 Bombardment Group for the Wakde-Biak operation, had settled in at Cyclops airfield by 15th May. Ground parties arrived with them, travelling in the American air transports. The squadrons' equipment was carried by jeeps and jeep trailers to a temporary camp site. No. 78 Wing headquarters allotted to each squadron a captured Japanese truck.

Operations began on 16th May. Sixteen Kittyhawks of No. 78 were sent as close escorts for American Liberators bombing Biak. Anti-aircraft gun fire coming from near Mokmer airfield damaged some of the Liberators but no enemy aircraft were seen, although on the previous day on a similar mission American Kittyhawks had intercepted and shot down a number of enemy fighters which attempted to interfere. All day on the 16th the Kittyhawks of No. 80 patrolled over Hollandia.

Next day the 163rd Regimental Combat Team of the American army was to land at Arara on the mainland opposite Wakde as a preliminary to the attack on Wakde itself. The fighters (including Australian Kittyhawks) and bomber units under No. 310 Bombardment Group provided patrols and direct ground support for the landing which took place at 7.15 a.m., after heavy naval bombardment by American and Australian cruisers and destroyers. There was little opposition to the landing.

Squadron Leader Cooper led the first detail of eight Kittyhawks from No. 80 Squadron over the target area at 8.35 a.m. As soon as they arrived at the beach-head they were directed to attack enemy barges seen near Sarmi. Cooper formed his Kittyhawks into line astern and dived from 7,000 feet to 1,500 feet. They released fourteen 250-lb bombs. Six of these exploded among the barges, four hit the beach and two fell twenty yards inland. The Kittyhawks then machine-gunned the barges and returned to Cyclops where they landed at 10.30 a.m. A further eight Kittyhawks from this squadron attacked the barges immediately afterwards, scoring hits. Meanwhile at 8.45 a.m. Brydon with another seven Kittyhawks from No. 78 arrived over the beach-head and patrolled until 10.20 a.m. without incident. Another detail from this squadron attacked a wireless station at Vandumuar Island in the early afternoon.

The preliminary landing at Arara was followed next day (18th May) by the main landing on Wakde Island. The naval bombardment was repeated, and just before the landing at 8 a.m., Cooper, leading his Kittyhawks and American Bostons, bombed the beach-head and then swept up and down at a low altitude, machine-gunning as the landing barges carrying the assault troops moved towards the shore. Other Kittyhawks of No. 78 patrolled above at a high level to prevent enemy air interference. In spite of the supporting fire both from naval vessels and aircraft, the enemy strenuously resisted. When the barges were 300 yards from the shore the leading waves came under a hail of cross-fire. The enemy fought to a finish, but by the afternoon of the second day, the Americans had seized the airfield and engineers began making it ready

for use. The last organised resistance was subdued on the same day. All told, the enemy lost 700 killed.

On the 19th, No. 80 flew thirty-eight sorties patrolling over Hollandia, while No. 78 flew thirty-nine sorties from early morning to dusk over Wakde. Neither squadron saw any sign of enemy air activity. Next day, however, No. 80 was called on by the force which had landed at Arara to aid in the repulse of an enemy ground attack at the Tor River. Cooper and three other pilots took off at 6.45 a.m. from Cyclops, arriving at the Tor at 7.15 a.m., whereupon the ground controller told them to attack the target indicated by smoke shell. All the bombs landed on the target, although the pilots could not see the results because of the heavy timber.

Ten minutes later another four Kittyhawks of No. 80 led by Flying Officer Cahill[2] went through the same procedure. These attacks continued through the morning, and earned high praise from the American ground commander who reported: "Close support mission early this date tremendous success. Air strikes broke up Jap counter-attack on our bridgehead across the Tor River." In the afternoon the Kittyhawks attempted to destroy a bridge crossing the Woske River, but all their bombs missed it.

From early morning on 21st May No. 80 again bombed enemy troops and the tracks and villages in the Tor River area. At 8.30 a.m. four Kittyhawks, directed by the American ground troops, bombed and then began machine-gunning. Pilot Officer Mudge,[3] one of the four pilots, was missing after the bombing. Later in the morning more Kittyhawks took off. They bombed enemy mortar positions which were put out of action and machine-gunned tracks and Maffin village.

On 22nd May and until the end of the month Australian and American fighters and light bombers continued their attacks in the Tor River-Arara area. The Americans were still forced to use captured Japanese bombs because of the lack of bombs at Hollandia. The 163rd Regiment was withdrawn from the area on 29th May, and the front line was established on the Tor River.

On 27th May, ten days after the Wakde landing, American troops attacked Biak, the largest island of the Schouten group. Again the Kittyhawks of Nos. 78 and 80 patrolled over the convoy on its way and accompanied the heavy bombers which bombarded the Japanese positions on the island. On the day of the assault American and Australian cruisers and destroyers stood offshore and pounded the beach near Bosnek village for twenty minutes. The 41st American Division provided the assault force and the first wave went ashore at 6.30 a.m. There was no immediate air or ground opposition by the enemy. American Boston and Liberator bombers as well as Lightnings, Thunderbolts and Australian Kittyhawks

[2] F-Lt J. B. Cahill, 23372. 24, 86 and 80 Sqns. Telephone operator; of Grange, Qld; b. Brisbane, 17 May 1921.

[3] P-O L. C. Mudge, 416879; 80 Sqn. Clerk; of Minnipa, SA; b. Streaky Bay, SA, 5 Feb 1919. Killed in action 21 May 1944.

provided support. No. 75 Squadron had flown up from Tadji to Cyclops the previous day to join with Nos. 78 and 80 in the task of protecting the landing force. These R.A.A.F. Kittyhawks had to come from Hollandia, 300 miles distant, and because of bad weather between Hollandia and Biak they did not appear at Biak until about midday. By that time two or three enemy fighter aircraft had made attacks on the beachhead but without causing serious damage. At five in the afternoon about twelve Japanese bombers flying at a very low altitude made an unsuccessful attack. Some were later shot down and the remainder driven off by American Thunderbolts. Altogether, on assault day, forty-nine R.A.A.F. Kittyhawk sorties covered the landing. Flight Sergeant Dawson[4] of No. 75 was forced to land in the water about 200 yards from Anus Island, but was picked up by a native in a canoe and twenty-five minutes later an American Catalina arrived and took him back to Hollandia.

Colonel Kuzume, the enemy ground force commander on Biak, had decided not to counter-attack the Americans immediately but hold his main force in reserve until after the Americans had come ashore. He had built up a formidable defensive area in the 500-foot high cliffs north of the Mokmer and Boroku airfields, from where his men could offer strong resistance to the American force, which he knew would make for the airfields.

The leading units of the 41st American Division drove rapidly west and on 28th May reached Mokmer village, but the Japanese defenders on the cliffs and from caves, opened heavy fire on the exposed right flank. Major-General Fuller reported late in the afternoon that the situation was grave, and asked for reinforcements. The Japanese launched counter-attacks on 29th May supported by tanks, and forced the retirement of the 186th Regiment.

Operating from Babo and Sorong, enemy aircraft continued to make light attacks by night and by day against Biak, and it was necessary to maintain strong air patrols to prevent undue interference with the American ground operations. The R.A.A.F., which patrolled daily, met no enemy planes in the air until 3rd June. On that day at 8.30 a.m. fifteen Kittyhawks led by Flight Lieutenant Osment[5] took off from Cyclops and flew to Biak, arriving at 10 a.m., when they reported to the fighter-director ship. About 11 a.m. Pilot Officer Gadsden,[6] flying as No. 2 to Osment, reported seeing two enemy aircraft. The Kittyhawks dropped their belly tanks and made a 360 degrees climbing turn into the sun, so as to be in position for a rear attack out of the sun. As the Kittyhawks closed they found a loose formation of twelve Oscars and three Kates. Osment described his attack on a Kate thus:

> I led the attack in from out of the sun and with my first burst started a fire in the starboard wing root. I then throttled back, sat in behind the enemy aircraft

[4] F-O A. C. Dawson, 408672; 75 Sqn. Clerk; of East Kew, Vic; b. Haberfield, NSW, 31 Aug 1921.

[5] F-Lt R. S. Osment, 400629. 22, 23 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of Glen Iris, Vic; b. Melbourne, 1 Feb 1921.

[6] F-O J. G. N. Gadsden, 418828; 78 Sqn. Student; of Toorak, Vic; b. Toorak, 28 Apr 1924. Killed in air accident, 25 Oct 1944.

and gave another burst which started another fire in the port wing root. The enemy aircraft started a turn to the left. I put a burst into the cockpit and it rolled over and dived straight into the sea in flames. . . . One member of the crew bailed out. I then climbed up and attempted to direct my flights onto various aircraft below us, but this was impossible, owing to the amount of radio traffic.

Pilot Officer Cowley,[7] also flying in Osment's section, opened fire at 200 yards on an Oscar which he damaged. He then attacked another Oscar from 100 yards, closing to 50 yards. The Oscar caught fire and crashed into the sea, but the Japanese pilot escaped by parachute. Flight Sergeant Harnden,[8] who followed Cowley into action evidently got into difficulties and took to his parachute. The other pilots thought he had made a safe descent to the water and was later rescued by an American destroyer. They learned afterwards that Harnden's parachute had failed to open and he was killed. The man they saw rescued from the water was a Japanese airman.

Flight Lieutenant White,[9] who led "Blue" section (four Kittyhawks) into the action, which had developed into a furious dog-fight of turning, diving, rolling and skidding aircraft, shot two enemy planes down and damaged another. White's fire blasted the wing off an Oscar which crashed into the sea. He then chased a Kate which he hit, and the aircraft went into the sea on its back. Altogether, No. 78 destroyed seven Oscars and two Kates and damaged one Oscar and one Kate, for the loss of one Kittyhawk and its pilot.[10] The dog-fight lasted for some 40 minutes and by 11.50 a.m. the fighter-director ship freed the squadron from duty. Osment called the Kittyhawks together and headed them for Hollandia. However, five machines were running short of petrol and were forced to land at the newly-captured airfield at Wakde, where they refuelled and took off again for Hollandia.

Biak was proving much harder to subdue than Hollandia and Wakde. Not only were the Japanese holding up the advance of the American infantry, but it became apparent that they were trying to reinforce the island. Admiral Toyoda had in fact ordered a force composed of the *16th Cruiser Division* and the battleship *Musashi* to embark the *2nd Amphibious Brigade* of 5,000 men at Zamboanga, Mindanao. One of Kenney's reconnaissance aircraft saw this force leaving Davao on 2nd June and the Japanese commander, knowing he had been discovered, and expecting heavy air attacks to follow, ordered his force to turn back. Another attempt was made on 7th June. On the 8th Kenney's patrolling Mitchells attacked the force, sinking the destroyer *Harasume,*

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[7] F-O R. R. Cowley, 405834. 23, 83 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of Taringa, Qld; b. Brisbane, 30 Nov 1922.

[8] F-Sgt W. H. Harnden, 417366; 78 Sqn. Clerk; of Alberton, SA; b. Alberton. 13 Dec 1921. Killed in action 3 Jun 1944.

[9] F-Lt G. H. White, 406121. 3, 80 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of Mt Lawley, WA; b. Albany, WA, 4 Jan 1922. Killed in action 8 Aug 1944.

[10] Pilots credited with "kills" were: F-O G. H. White, 1 Oscar, 1 Kate, 1 Kate damaged; F-Lt R. S. Osment, 1 Kate; F-Sgt R. R. Cowley, 1 Oscar; F-Lt D. R. Baker (North Sydney), 1 Oscar; F-Sgt C. L. Smith (Tamworth, NSW), 1 Oscar; F-Lt J. C. Griffiths (Albury, NSW), 1 Oscar; F-O R. E. Barker (Bowen, Qld), 1 Oscar; F-Lt J. C. Griffiths and F-O N. F. Blesing (Gladstone, SA) shared 1 Oscar.

while Lightnings shot down six fighters of the *23rd Air Flotilla* which was covering the force. The Japanese vessels continued steaming towards Biak, but at 11 that night Rear-Admiral Crutchley,[1] who had been given the task of destroying this naval force, attacked it as it entered Korim Bay, Biak Island. The Japanese withdrew at high speed. Crutchley's force pursued, but, except for one destroyer, his force failed to get within firing range. Despite these reverses, however, the Japanese managed to get some thousands of reinforcements into Biak.

Toyoda ordered a third attempt to relieve the garrison, sending the battleships *Yamato* and *Musashi* as well as cruisers and destroyers, but, on 11th June, they were recalled from Batjan Island, near Halmahera, to join the *Second Fleet* which had been ordered to the Marianas, where Admiral Spruance's invasion force had been sighted. The threat to the Marianas had also persuaded the Japanese navy to withdraw all remaining naval aircraft, including the *23rd Air Flotilla,* from New Guinea, leaving only a few army aircraft to carry on.

Although the American troops had taken Mokmer airfield on 7th June, it was still exposed to Japanese fire. Because of the slow progress on Biak, General Krueger, on 15th June, sent General Eichelberger to take over command. On 20th June the infantry attacked and seized Sorido and Boroku airfields. By the end of the month Biak was secure, although patrols continued to hunt down bands of Japanese until August.

Meanwhile, the three R.A.A.F. Kittyhawk squadrons continued to fly patrols over Biak. Conditions at Cyclops from which they operated were poor. Dust was the greatest nuisance, because it played havoc with engines and sometimes caused accidents.

The vigilant R.A.A.F. patrols resulted in only one more contact with the enemy. This was on 10th June, when eight Kittyhawks of No. 78 were covering a convoy of vessels over the western tip of Japen Island. The pilots saw an enemy aircraft five miles off. The Kittyhawks were then flying at 15,000 feet and Flight Lieutenants Baker[2] and Giles[3] gave chase as the enemy dived towards Babo. Baker caught it and fired, scoring many hits. The stricken aircraft crashed in flames into the sea. This was the last enemy aircraft shot down by the R.A.A.F. in the New Guinea theatre.

Until the end of June all three squadrons of No. 78 Wing were engaged in continuous flying duty, mainly providing air cover for the ground troops on Biak Island. They carried out occasional bombing and strafing raids and also escorted American air transports to Biak when an airfield had been prepared there.

Flying Officer Harvey,[4] a member of No. 78, was on base patrol near Hollandia on 13th June when his aircraft got into a spin on entering

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[1] Admiral Sir Victor Crutchley, VC, KCB, DSC; RN. (1914-18: HMS's *Centurion, Brilliant* and *Vindictive*). Comd HMS *Warspite* 1937-42, Aust Sqn 1942-44. B. 2 Nov 1893.

[2] F-Lt D. R. Baker, DFC, 411271. 76 and 78 Sqns. Clerk; of North Sydney; b. Suva, Fiji, 7 Feb 1920.

[3] F-Lt G. O'H. Giles, 417830; 78 Sqn. Student; of Medindie, SA; b. Adelaide. 27 Jun 1923.

[4] F-Lt C. R. Harvey, 406076. 84, 78 and 85 Sqns. Salesman; of Mount Lawley, WA; b. Fremantle, WA, 6 Aug 1916.

cloud. Not knowing how far down the cloud extended, the pilot decided to take to his parachute. Harvey landed in the jungle, and the following day was discovered by the pilot of a Piper Cub aircraft which went searching for him. The Piper Cub pilot dropped supplies and for the next three weeks Harvey was guided through the jungle by the Cub which also kept him supplied with food. On 4th July Harvey had reached the Idenburg River and a Walrus rescue aircraft picked him up and took him back to Hollandia.

The reforms introduced in the Kittyhawk squadrons to increase flying effort had a marked effect and in May and June No. 78 Wing was outflying similar American units. One squadron (No. 80) had flown a total of 663 sorties in May, involving a total of 1,705 hours flying on operations. The figures for all three squadrons in May and June are shown in the accompanying table.

| | May | | June | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Squadron | Sorties | Hours | Sorties | Hours |
| No. 75 . . | 343 | 735 | 457 | 1,314 |
| No. 78 . . | 601 | 1,665 | 470 | 1,405 |
| No. 80 . . | 663 | 1,705 | 527 | 1,614 |
| Totals . . | 1,607 | 4,105 | 1,454 | 4,333 |

In order to provide sufficient aircraft and equipment to increase the capacity of squadrons, Air Force headquarters disbanded two squadrons (Nos. 86 and 84) which returned to Townsville, Queensland, and were reduced to cadre. Their Kittyhawks were taken over by Nos. 78 and 81 Wings of No. 10 Group.

Again, North-Western Area's support of the Wakde-Biak campaigns was to be mainly the work of the American Liberators of No. 380 Group, which were to neutralise the Vogelkop Peninsula and Geelvink Bay areas. The Beauforts, Mitchells and Beaufighters had the task of harassing enemy installations bordering on the Timor Sea, while R.A.A.F. Catalinas were to mine the ports of Balikpapan, Kaimana and Surabaya to give "some indirect support to the operations".[5]

An appreciation dated 29th March, written by the Japanese *XIX Army* staff and captured at Hollandia late in April, showed that the enemy believed the Allies would attack Ambon after preliminary operations in south New Guinea through Merauke. The appreciation also considered that a landing would be made on Timor followed by further landings in the Sunda Islands. Darwin would be the main base supporting these operations. In the Netherlands East Indies the Japanese had some 300,000 troops to meet the expected offensive from Australia. These ground troops were steadily improving their installations. By contrast, the Japanese appeared to be abandoning active air defence within a 500-mile radius of Darwin. Allied air reconnaissance showed that of nineteen airfields

[5] The order to mine Balikpapan and Surabaya was not included in the Allied Air Forces Operations Instruction No. 51/1 which allotted tasks for the Wakde-Biak operation, but Bostock wrote to Kenney saying that the Catalinas would undertake this task to aid the main operations indirectly.

within this radius only two were being used. But while airfields were not in use, the ports were. In some places additional jetties had been built, and a light but steady flow of small shipping plied between the islands.

In the first week of May Nos. 1, 18 and 31 Squadrons bombed Penfui, Cape Chater, Manatuto, Koepang and other targets on Timor as well as the Aru Islands. Taking advantage of the moon on the night of 2nd May, six Beauforts of No. 1 and nine Mitchells of No. 18 bombed both Penfui and Koepang.

On the night of 5th May Catalinas of No. 43 were sent to search for and attack shipping which had been reported south of Sula in the Celebes group. Two of the Catalinas found one naval vessel which appeared to be a destroyer and seven merchant vessels in Vesuvius Bay, Sula. The ships were close together, and the first Catalina, captained by Flight Lieutenant Miller,[6] attacked from 2,800 feet, dropping all his bombs which, however, just missed the vessels. By the time the second Catalina arrived in the area, the ships were on the move. The captain attacked what he judged to be a 5,000-ton vessel, but again just missed. The third Catalina could not find the ships, and on the return journey dropped its bombs on Namlea, Buru Island.

Air Vice-Marshal Cole withdrew No. 2 Squadron from operations in May. The Beaufort aircraft of this squadron were being replaced by Mitchell bombers and it was necessary to free them from operational duties so that their training in the new aircraft would not be interrupted. The Mitchell carried one more crew member than the Beaufort, and a new drill had to be taught to each crew.

On 8th May No. 1 Squadron was ordered to attack the Japanese army barracks in Penfui. Six Beauforts took off on the mission but only three found their target and attacked. While over the target, anti-aircraft fire from the ground was bursting close to the Beauforts. Two machines, piloted by Squadron Leader Roxburgh[7] and Flight Sergeant Wallace,[8] were evidently hit by this fire; both failed to return.

A further attack on the barracks was ordered for the night of 11th May. Nos. 1 and 18 Squadrons took part. The Mitchells started fires, and when the Beauforts, led by Squadron Leader Hoddinott,[9] arrived over the target a few minutes later, the whole of the barracks area was burning, some rows of huts being completely burned out. To avoid the anti-aircraft fire, each aircraft attacked from different directions at two-minute intervals. Hoddinott's machine was caught and held in searchlights for a time, but he escaped the barrage of fire from the ground.

During the month No. 380 Group had been kept busy operating at its maximum. The Liberators had heavily attacked Penfui on 6th May and

[6] F-Lt R. N. D. Miller, DFC, 252359. 2 Communication Flight, 9 and 43 Sqns. Airlines operator; of Alice Springs, NT; b. Caulfield, Vic, 10 Feb 1915.

[7] Sqn Ldr G. B. D. Roxburgh, 260656. 8, 7, 6 and 1 Sqns. Clerk; of Albury, NSW; b. 2 Nov 1918. Killed in action 8 May 1944.

[8] F-Sgt T. Wallace, 415703; 1 Sqn. Mechanical draftsman; of Kalgoorlie, WA; b. Yarram, Vic, 10 Aug 1919. Killed in action 8 May 1944.

[9] Sqn Ldr W. J. Hoddinott, 620. 14, 32, 1 and 37 Sqns; 78 Wing 1945. Regular air force offr; of Wahring, Vic; b. Wahring, 28 Jan 1920.

on following days engaged in a number of reconnaissance and bombing flights to Utarom, Halmahera Island, Jefman, Langgur, Ambon, Manokwari and Buru.

Units of the British Eastern Fleet, supported by American Seventh Fleet units, were to make a concerted carrier aircraft attack on Surabaya on 17th May, the day before the Wakde Island landing. The R.A.A.F. and Cole's American bombers of No. 380 Group were also to take part in the operation, which involved considerable planning. The naval force included the battleships *Queen Elizabeth* and *Richelieu* (of the French Navy) and the aircraft carriers H.M.S. *Illustrious* and U.S.S. *Saratoga*. This force, with its destroyer screens, was to refuel at Exmouth Gulf in Western Australia on 15th May and then sortie into the Indian Ocean south of Java. After the attack on Surabaya by the carrier aircraft, Liberators would again attack the city at night in order to deter the enemy from sending aircraft to bomb the naval force.

While the fleet was refuelling at Exmouth Gulf, a force of Beauforts of No. 14 Squadron and American Catalinas flown up from Crawley Bay patrolled out to sea to give warning of the approach of hostile naval forces. Bostock had also ordered Cole to send two squadrons of Spitfires from North-Western Area to give fighter cover at Exmouth Gulf in the event of enemy bombers attempting an attack on the naval force while it refuelled.

Group Captain Jeffrey, of No. 1 Fighter Wing, commanded the fighters at Exmouth Gulf. Because only a small number of transport aircraft were allotted to effect the transfer the movement of the Spitfire detachments was delayed, and some did not arrive until two days after the operation was completed. The Spitfire pilots who flew their machines from Darwin through Drysdale, Broome and Port Hedland, found that fuel and servicing facilities en route were not satisfactory, nor were the facilities and dispersals at Exmouth Gulf. Petrol was supplied at Exmouth Gulf in unsealed drums containing quantities of water. There was a shortage of breathing oxygen, additional supplies of which did not arrive until after the operation was completed.

In spite of the difficulties, however, a detachment of Jeffrey's wing headquarters, and the aircraft of Nos. 457 and 54 Squadrons arrived at Exmouth Gulf on 9th May, and by 14th May a total of thirty Spitfires were serviceable. Protective patrolling by the Spitfires began on 14th May. Anti-submarine patrols by the Beauforts of No. 14 Squadron began on the same day.

The naval force left Exmouth Gulf on the evening of the 15th May, and at first light on the 17th May, when about 90 miles off the south coast of Java, launched 45 bombers and 40 fighters which reached Surabaya at 8.30 a.m. The enemy was taken by surprise and the air strike inflicted damage on the Wonokrono refinery, sank a ship in an attack on the harbour, and destroyed four aircraft on the Tanjong Perak airfield. After recovering its aircraft, the task force headed south, the American

units returning to Fremantle en route to the Pacific, while the British units refuelled at Exmouth Gulf on 19th May and then returned to Trincomalee. Meanwhile No. 380 Group had sent seven Liberators which staged through Corunna Downs in Western Area to attack Surabaya. They arrived over the target that night, dropping demolition bombs which added to the fires and destruction left by the carrier force earlier in the day.

It was found that planning the Catalina mining operations against Surabaya harbour was difficult because of the lack of aerial reconnaissance and the fact that nothing was known of the positions of anti-aircraft and searchlight defences. In addition, the carrier aircraft and Liberator strikes of the 17th May meant that the air defences would be alert. The decision was made to sow a field in an area which had been sown on a previous mission. This decision proved unfortunate. Six Catalinas of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons took off from Yampi Sound on the night of 20th May and at Surabaya ran into heavy fire from light guns of all kinds. Two of the Catalinas retired and laid their mines successfully from a safer datum point. Enemy fire hit one of them, making holes in both petrol tanks. This Catalina, captained by Wing Commander Havyatt, signalled later, when 150 miles from the target, that it was losing petrol rapidly and making for a forced landing on the north coast of Lombok. No further word was heard from it. Four nights later six more Catalinas were sent to lay mines in Surabaya Channel. Five dropped their mines in the planned position without opposition, but the sixth barely escaped destruction. A Seventh Fleet report of the operation states:

> The port engine of one aircraft stopped during the 25-second run down from datum at 200 ft. altitude. The starboard engine faltered under the increased load and the stalling aircraft dropped to 72 ft. altitude with the port wing down. The starboard engine picked up a split second before the crash and altitude was gained with the port engine firing about a quarter of the time. The port mine was dropped during the crisis. The captain circled overland, drove his crippled craft out on a second run and laid his starboard mine near the planned position. The port engine lost oil at a rate which rendered it useless in about two hours. Guns, ammunition, bunks, the radar and most of the radio equipment, the auxiliary power unit, and everything else that was movable, except the rubber boats, were jettisoned. The ensuing eight hours homeward flight was made with one engine.

On 18th May, three Catalinas of No. 43 Squadron laid mines in the channel approach to Balikpapan, and on 22nd May and 26th May two more missions to this target were completed. Beaufighters again escorted the Catalinas as they returned in daylight to Yampi Sound.

Many Catalinas assigned to the minelaying operations became unserviceable at Yampi due to lack of facilities there, and also to the fact that No. 43 Squadron had not yet moved its full equipment from Karumba to Darwin. Between 16th and 27th May, six of the sixteen aircraft assigned to missions were not capable of operating.

In addition to their mission against Surabaya on the night of 17th May, the Liberators of No. 380 Group had also bombed Noemfoor Island. On the 18th, one of four Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron was shot down

by anti-aircraft fire during a strafing attack on Saumlaki village. On 20th May the Beauforts of No. 1 Squadron attacked Tepa village on Babar Island. Strikes on a reduced scale followed until the end of May. The Catalina squadrons joined in the bombing on the 29th when they raided Liang airfield on Ambon. Squadron Leader Hurt[1] led six Catalinas of No. 43 on this strike. They bombed from 5,000 feet and were heavily fired on from the ground. Their bombs started large fires.

By the end of May there were few worthwhile targets that the medium bombers of No. 79 Wing could reach as long as they had no airfield in the islands to the north on which they could land and refuel. Air Vice-Marshal Cole, anxious to extend the attacking range of these bombers as well as the American Liberators, urged that an amphibious operation to seize a suitable island be undertaken. Intelligence information favoured Selaru, which was only lightly held. General Kenney favoured the operation and on 30th May put forward an outline plan for its capture. Since the opening of operations in the South-West Pacific Area, he said, the Allied Air Force had maintained a limited garrison in the Darwin area for the purpose of defence and a growing offensive against targets within range. The majority of operations had been confined to the Arafura, Timor, and Banda Sea areas. This was sufficient for its purpose while major operations were being conducted in eastern New Guinea, but with the advance into the western areas of New Guinea, the possible effort of the Darwin garrison did not fully cover requirements for support of New Guinea operations. Even an increase in forces available in the Darwin area would not meet the demands of the changing tactical situation.

General Headquarters' plan for the reoccupation of the Philippines brought out in June 1944 contained provision for the seizure of air bases in the Arafura Sea, which "may be occupied" if essential to the advance into Mindanao.

Cole began preparing for such an operation by sending bombers to attack enemy ground forces and shipping installations. He emphasised to Bostock that it would become more difficult if delayed, because the enemy was moving reinforcements in at night and consolidating beach defences.

Men and equipment of No. 80 Wing which was to be used in the operation had begun to arrive and train in the area, but in June it was decided to transfer No. 61 Works Wing from the Northern Territory to New Guinea for employment in the main advance towards the Philippines. Cole would not therefore have this unit available for the construction work necessary in an invasion of Selaru. He commented on this decision: "I feel that the R.A.A.F. here has suffered a retrograde step with no reciprocal compensation." He had Civil Construction Corps men in his area, but they were not permitted to be used outside Australia.

However, the real stumbling block to the operation was the inability to provide the necessary amphibious equipment, and finally, on 7th June,

[1] Sqn Ldr L. M. Hurt, DFC, 250623. 20 Sqn; comd 43 Sqn 1944. Garage manager; of Hobart; b. Hobart, 19 Oct 1913.

MacArthur shelved the plan until after the recapture of Mindanao, because there could not be a diversion of naval and amphibious forces until then.

At the end of May a Mosquito aircraft had arrived in North-Western Area for duty with No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit, and this greatly relieved the strain on No. 380 Group, which had borne the main responsibility for carrying out this important work. The long-range Mosquito, relying on its speed and ability to fly at high altitudes, did not need the defensive armament of the Liberator. Cole had found it necessary to send six Liberators in formation to do the reconnaissance work which one Mosquito could do. The first mission of the Mosquito was carried out over Ambon on 1st June, when it was piloted by Flying Officer Boss-Walker,[2] with Pilot Officer Love[3] as navigator.

In June this Mosquito was used to its maximum to carry out urgent flights. It flew nine operational missions, while one Lightning aircraft of No. 1 Photographic Reconnaissance Unit carried out four. The two machines photographed areas in the Kai Islands, Timor, Flores, Sumba, Celebes and Surabaya. On 25th June, while over Surabaya, one of the Mosquito's engines failed but Boss-Walker continued to take photographs of the city until his film had been used up, before returning a distance of 900 miles to Broome on one engine.

On the morning of 12th June, the Japanese sent a Dinah reconnaissance aircraft over Darwin and south to Fenton. On its way back from Fenton Spitfires of No. 452 Squadron caught it and destroyed it near Point Blaze. Flying Officer Gamble[4] attacked the Dinah first, tearing a hole in its wing. Other pilots scored hits on it and it went into a spin, struck the water and exploded. During the attack Flying Officer O'Loughlin's[5] engine failed, and he was forced to take to his parachute at 13,000 feet. He landed safely close to the shore, and two hours later a Catalina aircraft picked him up.

The Spitfire pilots of No. 1 Wing had again become restive as a result of the long spell of "operational monotony that has hung over the area since before Christmas". The squadron diarist of No. 452 expressed the feelings of the men in this entry:

> Morale is a very big factor up here these days, with the war a long way off and no prospect of action from day to day. All we do is pray for the time to come when we will be told to get packing and see some war. There are a multitude of rumours as to the destination of the squadron and the cooks and hygiene squad as usual can be relied upon to be the first with the "real good guts". Men of bright personalities are precious jewels in these "dog days", and keep others from brooding on the slow effluxion of time.

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[2] F-Lt K. F. Boss-Walker, DFC, 400076. 1 PRU and 1 MRU. Salesman; of Sandy Bay, Tas; b. Hobart, 16 Nov 1915.

[3] F-O J. N. Love, 433602. 1 PRU and 94 Sqn. Clerk; of Strathfield, N.S.W.; b. Ashfield, NSW, 30 Mar 1925.

[4] F-Lt K. M. Gamble, 403049. 234, 75 and 452 Sqns. Company director; of Randwick, NSW; b. Sydney, 16 Mar 1916.

[5] F-Lt C. H. O'Loughlin, 407449. 54 Sqn RAF and 452 Sqn. Clerk; of Port Augusta, SA; b. Port Augusta, 25 Apr 1918.

No. 2 Squadron began operating with Mitchells in June, but the main effort of No. 79 Wing during the month was contributed by No. 18 Squadron which carried out 149 sorties against 115 by No. 2 and 58 by No. 31. However, No. 31 had a strength of only sixteen Beaufighters and was also considerably below normal personnel strength. Cole recommended that to increase the effort of this squadron No. 30 should be brought from New Guinea and operated from North-Western Area. However, Bostock dismissed the idea because of the heavily increased duties which had been given No. 30 in New Guinea.

No. 18 carried out many of its attacks against aerodromes on Timor. It heavily attacked Cape Chater airfield on 19th June, dropping bombs on the runway and dispersal area. It also sank a small vessel and two prahus off Timor, and a 50-ton lugger off Flores. On 23rd June, the commanding officer of the squadron, Lieut-Colonel te Roller, who was flying as second pilot in a Mitchell during an attack on Timor Island, was killed when the aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crashed into the sea and exploded.

On the night of 25th June Cole sent four Catalinas of No. 43, armed with torpedoes, to attack shipping in Bima Bay, Sumbawa Island. It was the first torpedo attack to be made from North-Western Area and the target was 900 miles distant. The four Catalinas took off from Darwin, led by Squadron Leader Hurt. Because of engine trouble one returned to base soon after taking off.

Arriving at Bima anchorage, Hurt saw and prepared to attack a 4,000- to 5,000-ton vessel, in the face of intense anti-aircraft gun fire. The Intelligence report describes what ensued:

> The port torpedo was dropped at a range of 1,000 yards and was seen by Lieut-Commander D. George[6] to be running directly for the ship. Almost immediately, Duty 1 received hits from the intense light and medium ack-ack put up by the ship, and the captain, S/L Hurt, was wounded and was unable to take part in the operation. He fell forward across the controls and the second pilot, F/O Titshall,[7] took over, and despite damage to the flying instruments and being on the wrong side for aiming, managed to straighten the aircraft and fire the second torpedo at a range of 700 yards. This torpedo was seen to pass astern of the ship. The second pilot then took violent evasive action, including steep turns to port and starboard.

The crew of the Catalina did not see any hits on the ship and evidently the attack was not successful. One of the other Catalinas dropped bombs on one of several ships it found in the bay, while the other bombed Bima town.

At the end of June, another amphibious task force, which included units of No. 10 Group, was moving forward north of Dutch New Guinea to the assault on Noemfoor Island. The effort of North-Western Area was therefore again directed to supporting the main drive.

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[6] Lt-Cdr D. J. S. W. George, OBE; RANR(S). HMAS's *Canberra* 1938-39, *Perth* 1939-40. Attached to RAAF as naval observer 1943-46. Of South Yarra, Vic; b. Clonbare, Ireland, 24 Feb 1912. Died 12 Oct 1947.

[7] F-Lt B. A. Titshall, DFC, 409457. 43 and 20 Sqns. Sales manager; of Melbourne; b. Wellington, NZ, 7 Sep 1911.

CHAPTER 15

# TO NOEMFOOR AND MOROTAI

ON 15th June 1944, nine days after the Anglo-American invasion of Normandy, the V American Marine Corps went ashore at Saipan Island in the Mariana group. The invasion was of great importance because it cut Japanese sea communications to the south and brought the enemy home islands within reach of heavy bombers. "Saipan," said Vice-Admiral Weneker, the German naval attaché at Tokyo, "was really understood to be a matter of life and death."

Admiral Nimitz employed in the Saipan operation 2,000 aircraft and 600 vessels, ranging from battleships and aircraft carriers to small assault boats. The mounting of such a large-scale project within a week of the Normandy invasion and concurrently with General MacArthur's drive in Dutch New Guinea was evidence enough to convince Japanese leaders of the strength of the fighting forces and the war material now at the disposal of the Allies. Nevertheless, to make the Pacific operations of 1944 possible there had to be considerable interchange of vessels and means between Nimitz's and MacArthur's commands. MacArthur would have the vessels long enough to make a landing and as soon as he was settled ashore he would have to hand them back so that Nimitz could make one. The timing had to be fixed to allow this interchange, and the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff retained control of the shipping which supported both commanders to ensure that the maximum interchange was achieved.

Early in 1944 Nimitz had planned to invade Truk and, some months later, the Marianas, but the Joint Chiefs of Staff on 12th March had directed him to neutralise Truk by air bombardment, by-pass it to the north, and invade the Marianas two months and a half ahead of the time originally planned. The assault force for the Marianas was staged in three principal areas, namely the South Pacific, Pearl Harbour and the United States. Bringing them together from such widely separated points was a notable feat of planning and coordination.

From the beginning of June, bombers of the Fifth Air Force and 13th Air Task Force operating from Green Island, Los Negros, Emirau, and Hollandia aided the operation by bombarding Truk, Palau and Yap. Carrier aircraft struck at Pagan, Tinian, Rota, Guam and Saipan in the Marianas. Preceded by gun-fire from battleships, the marines then went ashore at Saipan, but desperate Japanese resistance made their task difficult and slow.

Admiral Toyoda had learned on 9th June that Admiral Spruance's fleet was approaching Guam and he had ordered the execution of a plan which provided for "one big operation" against the American fleet using land-based and carrier-based planes in a combined attack, followed by the destruction of the amphibious vessels which carried the assault forces.

The Japanese carrier fleet with 450 aircraft under Vice-Admiral Ozawa sortied from Tawi Tawi in the southern Philippines, while Rear-Admiral Kakuda prepared some 500 land-based planes for action from Palau, Yap and Guam. Reference has been made already to the withdrawal from Sorong to Palau at this time, of the *23rd Air Flotilla,* which opposed MacArthur's advance, and the abandonment of the Japanese Navy's third attempt to reinforce Biak when the American threat to the Marianas appeared.

Battle was joined on 19th June when Ozawa's carriers launched a series of aircraft attacks on Spruance's task force, which included fifteen large and small carriers. Over Guam the American fighters defeated a big force of Japanese fighters and the Japanese carrier pilots who were to land there to refuel had no protection. Altogether the Japanese lost 400 carrier aircraft.

American submarines sank two carriers, including Ozawa's flagship *Taiho,* forcing him to transfer his flag during the battle. The following day American carrier pilots attacked, sinking the carrier *Hitaka,* but ninety American planes were lost when they ran short of petrol and had to alight on the sea. After losing a total of three carriers sunk, one badly damaged and several others damaged, Toyoda ordered Ozawa to abandon the attack and retire to Okinawan waters. It was a crushing defeat for the Japanese Navy.

Though its contribution was very small compared with the total effort that went into the Saipan campaign, the R.A.A.F. took part indirectly in the operation by laying mines in the waters around Palau and Kau Bay, Halmahera. On 9th June Nimitz had asked MacArthur's headquarters to provide Catalinas to do this work. In order to fly six sorties needed to carry out the task at Palau, the planned mining operation at Kau Bay was halved. Spruance's fleet had laid 78 mines at Palau on 31st March and the 12 to be laid by the R.A.A.F. in June were not likely to be more than a nuisance to enemy vessels.

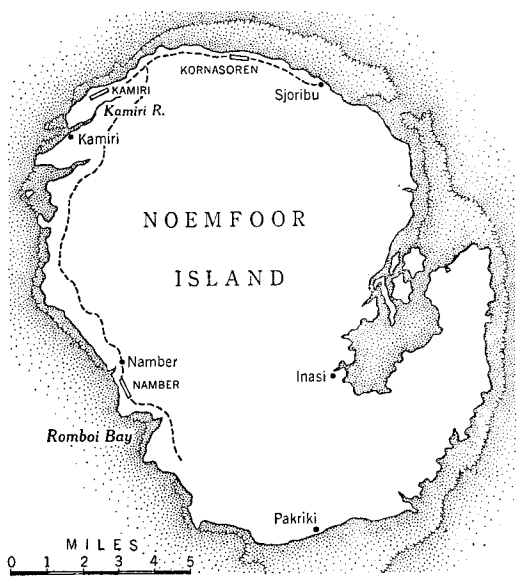
There was a danger that the Catalinas would meet night fighter interception if they operated out of Darwin and it was therefore decided to use Lake Sentani, at Hollandia, as the advanced base. There were no facilities for flying-boats at the lake, but these were improvised by the Fifth Air Force. The Catalinas, which came from Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons, taxied up to the beach and rested there with their hulls in the water and tails over the land, the bows being moored to floats made from empty oil drums and the tails tied to coconut palms. The crews were provided with sleeping quarters and food at the camp of No. 78 (Fighter) Wing R.A.A.F., some three miles from the beach.

The Catalinas had arrived at Lake Sentani on 15th June and two laid mines on the night of 16th-17th June at Palau. A third flying-boat which went on the mission returned when its radar equipment became unserviceable. On succeeding nights further mines were laid both at Palau and at Kau Bay where much enemy shipping had been seen by observation aircraft. All the Catalinas returned safely from these missions.

The ground struggle on Saipan was bitter, but by 9th July the marines had crushed all organised resistance. Further landings followed on Guam (21st July) and Tinian (24th July).

Japan's precarious position was now apparent to many influential Japanese. On 27th June a group of leaders called on the Premier, General Tojo, and asked him to resign. He refused; but on 18th July the newspapers announced the fall of Saipan, describing "the heroic death of all its defenders" and Tojo gave way. It was at about this time, according to Shigeru Hasunuma, chief aide-de-camp to the Emperor, that "I was able vaguely to discern the Emperor's 'peace anxiety' ". The Emperor directed Admiral Yonai and General Koiso to form a new Cabinet.

With Japanese attention fixed on Saipan, MacArthur's forces prepared to jump westwards to Noemfoor Island in Geelvink Bay. Again, MacArthur's primary interest in Noemfoor was that it would provide airfield facilities from which fighters could take off to escort bombers on missions in the Geelvink Bay-Vogelkop Peninsula area and at Ambon-Ceram. Fighters based on airfields at Noemfoor would also give advanced protection for the main air concentrations at Biak; would dominate the air over western New Guinea and would provide escorts for bombers attacking Halmahera in anticipation of the invasion of Sansapor and Morotai, which were to follow.




Noemfoor lies at the northern limit of Geelvink Bay, midway between the Vogelkop Peninsula and Biak. A fringe of coral reef runs almost completely around the island which is about fourteen miles long and roughly elliptical. The northern half is low and flat. It had a native population of about 5,000 and native foods and water were ample for their needs.

Noemfoor was selected because it was estimated that not more than one battalion of Japanese would be based there, and it could therefore be seized without large-scale operations. It was essential that it should be a small-scale attack because amphibious vessels in the South-West Pacific were already overtaxed providing the requirements of Wakde and Biak. Noemfoor was a particularly suitable objective because it had the

greatest number of airfields (Kamiri, Kornasoren and Namber) and could be seized in the quickest time with the smallest force. Furthermore, by the end of June, it had become abundantly clear that the Japanese air defences in western New Guinea were at a low ebb. On 30th June the following estimate of the enemy situation appeared in an Intelligence report issued by General Headquarters:[1]

A general state of debilitation now characterises the enemy's air bases in western New Guinea. Jefman is apparently abandoned. Little activity has been observed at Samate. The latter field has been so wet as almost to preclude air operations. The Babo area likewise, is generally unserviceable . . . there are only four serviceable fighters on the ground . . . the Namber and Kamiri strips at Noemfoor, while rough, are probably serviceable though getting little use . . . a possibly generous statement now places nineteen bombers and thirty-seven fighters in New Guinea.

Apart from the numerical weakness of the Japanese Air Force in the forward zones, the Japanese were fast losing the ability to replace losses. General Arnold has described how, as the Pacific war progressed,

the Japanese found they were losing their most experienced leaders, their air staffs, their planners and best mechanics, in a strange way. Their key people were being marooned and by-passed as we advanced across the Pacific. The loss of such specialists helped to break the strength of the Japanese Air Force. No air force can lose hundreds, perhaps thousands, of its trained personnel—especially in the experienced technical and staff categories—and maintain the same standard of effectiveness. The Japanese had no other sources from which to pick up experience in the air. They did not have it in China, or in Japan.[2]

On 17th June MacArthur directed the Sixth Army to seize Noemfoor on 30th June; a few days later this date was altered to 2nd July because of "new logistical considerations". The Fifth Air Force was again the air assault force for Noemfoor and General Whitehead assigned No. 10 Group an important role. He appointed Air Commodore Scherger air task force commander, and directed him to establish his headquarters at Kamiri airfield soon after the beach-head had been secured, and assume operational control of all air force squadrons on Noemfoor until the commanding officer of No. 309 Bombardment Wing U.S.A.A.F. arrived. After that Scherger would continue to control all units at Kamiri but relinquish control of the units at Kornasoren to the commander of No. 309 Wing. As soon as possible Scherger was to call forward No. 78 Wing to Noemfoor to be followed at later stages by Nos. 77 and 71 Wings, and by D-plus-40 days, by No. 81 Wing. The American units assigned were: No. 348 Fighter Group (75 Thunderbolts), No. 58 Fighter Group (75 Thunderbolts), No. 417 Bombardment Group (Fifth Air Force) and No. 307 Bombardment Group (Thirteenth Air Force).

The rapid repair of the Japanese airfields on Noemfoor was important since it was being undertaken primarily to provide facilities for the deployment of air power. Group Captain Dale, commander of No. 62 Works Wing, was appointed chief engineer for the operation, and given command

[1] Military Intelligence Section, General Staff, "Daily Summary" No. 831, 30 June-1 July, 1944.
[2] H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission* (1949), p. 371.

of the American engineer units as well as those of the R.A.A.F. His first task was the repair of Kamiri airfield as soon as it had been seized by the assaulting troops. Immediately it was ready the Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing would be called forward from Biak to give fighter defence.

To prevent enemy air resistance to the landing, squadrons of the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces had beaten down Babo, Jefman, Samate, Manokwari and other enemy airfields in Dutch New Guinea. As with earlier landings, the squadrons under the control of North-Western Area at Darwin were also used to assist the Noemfoor landing by harassing enemy installations in Timor and Ceram, and aiding the neutralisation of bases in the Vogelkop Peninsula.

On 20th June, the Fifth Air Force had directed Air Commodore Scherger to embark his Aitape headquarters for Noemfoor via a staging camp at Tum. Group Captain Dale and the headquarters of No. 62 Works Wing, together with a forward detachment of No. 4 Works Maintenance Unit, arrived at Tum on 23rd June. Scherger and his headquarters arrived on 24th June. The movement of No. 10 Group's units was hurried, only eight hours' notice being given. Conditions at Tum were deplorable as a result of heavy rain. Equipment suffered because of exposure to sun, air and rain, and unavoidable rough handling on the way. In spite of discomforts and cramped living conditions, however, the spirits of the men remained high. The advanced element of the construction wing was to go ashore at Noemfoor immediately after the assault. On 27th June they took part in a trial invasion landing east of Tum and at 6 p.m. on 1st July made a rendezvous with their convoy of naval escorts near Biak.

It was believed there were only about 1,500 Japanese on the island, but the landing was to be made on the coastal strip adjoining the Kamiri airfield where the enemy defences were strong. Pre-assault bombardment was therefore to be much more intense than on previous invasions. On 2nd July, eight minutes before the assault, three cruisers, twenty-two destroyers and three rocket ships opened fire. Ten minutes before the landing-craft made for the shore Liberators dropped 300 1,000-lb bombs along the line of the beach defences. At 7.30 a.m. the augmented 158th Regimental Combat Team began its landing, and tanks and artillery were ashore by 9 a.m. When the infantry landed, not a shot was fired by the enemy. The Kamiri airfield was quickly seized after dazed groups of Japanese had been cleaned out of the caves at its eastern end by troops using flame-throwers. A half hour after the infantry had landed Dale and the advance party of his works wing went ashore on alligator tanks. The enemy was still holding parts of Kamiri airfield and mortar fire opened up on the beach. Although shells were bursting on hard coral at the water's edge, only two Americans were wounded. There were no Australian casualties. Dale and his staff officers made a survey of Kamiri airfield and the area as far as the Kamiri River, while others of his men established camp at one end of the airfield. An American engineer unit after filling in bomb craters began lengthening Kamiri and constructing dispersals.

On the day before the assault the Kittyhawks of Nos. 75 and 80 Squadrons, together with a number of ground staff men, moved from Cyclops airfield at Hollandia to Mokmer airfield on Biak ready to cover the Noemfoor operations and fly in to Kamiri as soon as it was ready to receive aircraft. No. 80 Squadron flew patrols over Biak on 2nd July and the following day extended them to Noemfoor. These patrols continued until the Kittyhawks were ready to move to Noemfoor but there was not a single clash with enemy aircraft.

After interrogation of a Japanese prisoner who, to the surprise of his questioners, said there were 5,000 enemy on the island, Brigadier-General Patrick, the task force commander, asked for reinforcements and General Krueger dispatched the 503rd Paratroop Regiment. Some 1,400 men were dropped on Kamiri on 3rd and 4th July, about 9 per cent of them being injured. However, the prisoner's information proved to be false and the ground forces had little difficulty in crushing all resistance. After 7th July only mopping-up operations remained.

On 4th July the Americans had occupied the Kornasoren airfield. On this day the advanced headquarters of Scherger's No. 10 Group, including 35 officers and 89 men, arrived off the beach-head and went ashore that night. Group headquarters was set up about one mile from the east end of the airfield. There had been no air resistance at all until the night of 4th July when a light bomber dropped three small bombs near the mouth of the Kamiri River. A few days later four single-engined fighters damaged dumps when they dropped about forty incendiary bombs.

During July the pilots of No. 78 Wing continued to keep a fighter "umbrella" over Biak, Noemfoor and Hollandia. Occasionally the monotony of patrol duty was broken when they carried out dive-bombing and strafing missions in support of the troops on Biak. On 18th July the ground staff of No. 78 Squadron was flown from Hollandia to Kamiri airfield which had been opened for operations and on 20th July twenty-three aircraft of No. 78 landed at the airfield. They were followed two days later by the air echelons of Nos. 75 and 80 Squadrons which flew in from Biak.

The constant strain imposed on the men by the frequent moves was beginning to tell. The diarist of No. 78 notes in July 1944:

> The squadron has moved six times in nine months involving the setting up of temporary camp sites before anything of a permanent nature can be completed. Packing, loading and transportation involves intensive work on a twenty-four hour basis before departure and arrival at new locations. During the process of movement flying is maintained. Fatigue is particularly noticeable following the strenuous work on each move. Numerous nightly red alerts create disturbed sleep, there being two actual enemy aircraft raids since arrival.

No. 78 began operations from Noemfoor on 21st July when twenty-four aircraft patrolled above Noemfoor from dawn to dusk. Noemfoor is not far distant from Manokwari and the last detail on patrol saw two enemy barges near Manokwari and strafed them while they were loading stores.

Both barges burned and were destroyed. Nos. 75 and 80 carried out their first patrols from Noemfoor on 23rd July.

American torpedo boats were patrolling in Geelvink Bay attacking enemy small vessels, barges, canoes and shore targets. The R.A.A.F. Kittyhawks gave them cover during some of these operations. On 24th July four Kittyhawks found a barge hide-out and, in a strafing attack, set fire to two and damaged five. Anti-aircraft fire was encountered and a shell or bullet struck Flying Officer Wehl's[3] aircraft forcing him to land in the sea four miles from Manokwari, but an American patrol boat in the area saw Wehl crash and rescued him uninjured from the water.

On 26th July eight aircraft of No. 78 struck at the waterfront in the Jefman-Samate area. A barge was strafed and left sinking. Operational sorties flown by No. 78 Wing in July totalled 1,369, compared with 1,454 in June. The figure was high in the circumstances because all squadrons had interrupted their flying to move their bases during the month. Numbers of pilots who had reached a high standard of flying proficiency had now completed their nine-months operational tour in the tropics and were due to be posted south. Already replacement pilots with little previous experience had arrived and squadron commanders had the task of bringing them up to the high standard set by the tour-expired men.

While the American engineers had concentrated on the construction of Kamiri airfield, Dale's Australian works squadrons built Kornasoren, which was to be occupied by Fifth Air Force units. Contrary to the Intelligence reports received earlier, the Japanese had completed only a few hundred feet of the runway. The Australians began work on Kornasoren on 17th July and by the 25th it was ready to receive aircraft, and a squadron of American Thunderbolts moved in. The airstrip was completed to a length of 6,000 feet and width of 100 feet. Work continued day and night. The R.A.A.F. squadrons had not been supplied with sufficient heavy equipment and had to borrow bulldozers from the American engineers for clearing the heavy rain forest.

Mines had been laid by the Japanese from the north-east end of Kamiri down to Kornasoren and these had to be removed before construction work could begin. R.A.A.F. bomb-disposal men recovered the mines and also rendered safe many unexploded American bombs which had been dropped before the invasion.

General MacArthur needed one last air base in western New Guinea before moving into objectives in the Halmahera area. Scouts of the Sixth Army found that the coast near Sansapor on the Vogelkop Peninsula was a suitable place to build an airfield and at the end of June the army had been ordered to seize it.

From Kamiri the Kittyhawks of Nos. 75, 78 and 80 Squadrons were already giving indirect support to this operation by harassing the Japanese

[3] F-Lt R. C. Wehl, 405332. 453 and 75 Sqns. Student; of Barcaldine, Qld; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 15 May 1921.

in the Vogelkop Peninsula and denying the use of Geelvink Bay to small Japanese surface craft. In the week of 22nd to 29th July these squadrons flew 677 operational sorties. As D-day (30th July) approached, General Kenney directed No. 380 Group from Darwin to increase its bombardment of Ceram-Ambon where the enemy, in spite of continued air bombardment, maintained a number of aircraft which would be used to bomb Sansapor.

A heavy raid was made on Halmahera on 27th July, when bombers attacked airfields, destroying thirty enemy aircraft on the ground. The Bula oilfields on Ceram were also struck heavily on 27th and 28th July. By the time the assault force was ready to move in to Sansapor enemy air strength had been so reduced that there was little to fear from it.

On 29th July as the task force sailed north of Noemfoor the R.A.A.F. Kittyhawks patrolled overhead to protect it from enemy raiders, but no interference was attempted. The invasion took place as planned next morning and was heavily supported by Fifth Air Force and R.A.A.F. aircraft, but again there was no interference either in the air or on the ground. Allied domination of the air was so complete that Allied aircraft were sent over the invasion area spraying D.D.T. the day before the landing to keep down the enemies of health and comfort—mosquitoes and flies. In addition to landing at Sansapor the American troops landed at Amsterdam and Middleburg Islands just off the coast. In a few days the whole area was secured for a total cost of 10 dead and 31 wounded. The enemy forces in the area consisted mainly of service troops and labourers. A number of Formosan labourers surrendered during the first week after the landing.

The Sansapor landing was the last of MacArthur's amphibious operations in New Guinea and it completed an advance of 1,500 miles since the first move from Milne Bay to Kiriwina and Woodlark, thirteen months before.

At Noemfoor early in August Air Commodore Cobby had assumed command of No. 10 Group from Scherger who had been injured in a jeep accident. The 50-year-old Cobby was one of the most highly decorated members of the Royal Australian Air Force. He had established a notable reputation as a fighter pilot of the Australian Flying Corps in the 1914-18 war and had shot down many German aircraft. When the 1939-45 war began Cobby was not in the R.A.A.F., having resigned his commission in 1936 to become Controller of Operations on the Civil Aviation Board. He had been placed on the Citizen Air Force Reserve, however, with the rank of wing commander, and on 25th July 1940 he was called up to become Director of Recruiting. Later he served as Air Officer Commanding North-Eastern Area and Commandant of the R.A.A.F. Staff School. On 1st August Group Captain Gibson, who since early 1943 had been Bostock's senior air staff officer at R.A.A.F. Command in Brisbane, had been posted to No. 10 Group in June as Senior Air Staff Officer replacing Group Captain Pearce.

With No. 10 Group now at the western extremity of New Guinea it had become difficult for Northern Command, which still controlled the group administratively, to carry out its supply and maintenance functions adequately. Air Force Headquarters therefore separated No. 10 Group from Northern Command on 1st July, but, for operations, it continued to be under the command of Fifth Air Force. A proposal made by Bostock at this stage, that the name of the group be changed to "First Tactical Air Force", was deferred pending the return of the Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, who was in London.

Following the successful landing at Sansapor, No. 10 Group's three Kittyhawk squadrons at Kamiri now entered a period of intense activity. Airfield construction was being rushed at Biak, Sansapor and Owi Island as well as at Noemfoor to accommodate the many squadrons at rear bases which were now so far away from the war that they had few worthwhile targets to hit. Until the forward airfields were built there was nothing for them to do so Kenney encouraged the granting of leave in Australia to Fifth Air Force men, as a result of which "Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane saw more of the United States Air Force than at any time before or since".[4]

By contrast, No. 78 Wing was being pushed almost to the limit of its operational capacity. In early August its chief responsibility was Sansapor. On the 4th thirty-six Kittyhawks from all three squadrons patrolled over this area. On the 5th forty-seven patrolled Sansapor again. Between the 8th and 10th four Kittyhawk pilots were lost on operations. One pilot of No. 78 Squadron crashed into the sea and was killed after a strafing attack on a village on 8th August; next day, over Sansapor, two Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron collided in the air while on patrol duty, and crashed into the sea killing both pilots. Another Kittyhawk, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Jacklin,[5] was struck by one of the colliding aircraft and part of its port mainplane was broken off, but Jacklin recovered from a spin and flew the damaged aircraft 200 miles back to Noemfoor, landing safely. On 10th August another pilot of No. 78 Squadron failed to return after he had taken part in the machine-gunning of a village.

Meanwhile, the aircraft of No. 77 Wing, which now controlled Nos. 30 (Beaufighter) and 22 (Boston) Squadrons, had been called forward to Noemfoor to join in the air campaign over Dutch New Guinea. The wing headquarters had already arrived by boat on 12th July and the aircraft of No. 30 Squadron were flown in from Tadji on 4th August.

Eleven Bostons arrived on the 10th and six on the following day. The squadron had been re-equipped with Boston "G" aircraft which had a petrol capacity of 300 gallons more than the older type of machine, thus giving them a 500-mile range carrying 2,000 pounds of bombs. The Bostons, commanded by Squadron Leader Woodman,[6] were allotted the

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[4] G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, p. 416.

[5] F-Lt T. R. Jacklin, 405738; 75 Sqn. Cane farmer; of Mackay, Qld; b. Mackay, 15 Feb 1920.

[6] W Cdr C. E. Woodman, 169. 21 Sqn; comd 22 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Killara, NSW; b. Northwood, NSW, 14 Oct 1915.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

An Auster of No. 17 Air Observation Post Flight preparing to spot for the artillery over Bougainville on 18th February 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A Dakota of No. 36 Squadron dropping supplies to forward troops on Bougainville in February 1945. During the period January to August 1945, this squadron dropped 2,514 tons of supplies



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Japanese taking shelter from a strafing attack by Boomerangs of No. 5 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, on 4th June 1945, during the Bougainville campaign. The photograph was taken from a few feet above tree-top level.

task of attacking enemy airfields, villages and shipping. The Beaufighters were also to attack airfields and carry out sweeps against waterborne traffic along the coasts of Ceram and west to Waigeo Island. Led by Squadron Leader Sandford, six Beaufighters carried out their first mission to Ceram on 19th August. Near Cape Paa they fired on a small 75-ton vessel which had been camouflaged with green foliage. Many of the Japanese on the vessel jumped overboard in their anxiety to escape the strafing and were seen swimming in the water alongside.

By 18th August engineers had built two airfields at Sansapor—Mar on the mainland and at Middleburg on Middleburg Island. American Lightnings of the Thirteenth Air Force had been flown in and by 24th August the Americans began air operations from these new bases. The arrival of the American fighters at Sansapor relieved No. 78 Wing Kittyhawks of the duty of providing air cover patrols and they flew their last patrol mission on 21st August.

By August air fighting in the South-West Pacific Area had slowed down. The Japanese had withdrawn most of their aircraft to the Philippines where the bulk of their Pacific strength was now collected. They had there an estimated strength of 1,157 aircraft, a force which had been built up by withdrawing aircraft from the forward areas and by a flow of air reinforcements from home. Enemy operations in New Guinea had been cut down to sporadic night harassing raids on Biak and Noemfoor. However, although the Japanese had few aircraft in the forward areas, they continued to maintain serviceable aerodromes especially in Halmahera, Ceram and Ambon. From these forward bases and others on the Vogelkop Peninsula they would be able to stage raids against forward Allied bases.

Freed of the responsibility of patrolling Sansapor, Cobby now turned his attention to some of these forward enemy airfields. He planned an all-out offensive on 23rd, 24th and 25th August using all available Kittyhawks, Beaufighters and Bostons. The main target for the Kittyhawks was the airfield system at Babo, while the Beaufighters and Bostons were to hammer the three enemy airfields in the area south of the Maccleur Gulf —Mongosah, Sagan and Otawiri.

Thirty-six aircraft of No. 78 concentrated on No. 2 strip at Babo on 23rd August and 31 bombs were seen to explode along and in the centre of the runway. The operation was repeated the following day when 24 bombs fell directly in the centre of the runway, the rest bursting along the end of the runway and among huts and dispersals. On 25th August 36 aircraft scored a further 23 direct hits on the runway of No. 2 strip. Altogether the Kittyhawk wing flew 304 sorties against the target in the three days' bombardment. One pilot was lost.[7]

North-Western Area air support for the Noemfoor landing had begun late in June. On the 27th, No. 2 Squadron, which had been engaged mainly on searches and patrols since it converted to Mitchell bombers, made

[7] F-Sgt P. F. Guster (Henley Beach, SA), whose aircraft was hit by anti-aircraft fire and crashed into the sea.

its first strike with the new aircraft. The target was Lautem West on Timor Island where the airfield was to be neutralised. Flight Lieutenant Hill[8] led the nine Mitchells taking part. They left Hughes airfield early in the afternoon and at 5.15 p.m. began the attack. Bombs from the first three, released at 10,000 feet, fell short into the sea, but the following aircraft landed their bombs on the centre of the west end of the target. Anti-aircraft fire was moderate and it appeared that the enemy had been warned of the approach of the Mitchells.

The numbers of small Japanese vessels plying between the islands north of Darwin increased in July, and the Mitchells and Beaufighters sought them out. On 1st July four Mitchells of No. 18 Squadron attacked a small vessel which was accompanied by eighteen barges. Bombs fell among the barges and one just missed the vessel. On the same day, the Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron destroyed beached vessels while on a shipping sweep around Leti, Sermata and Babar Islands. Operating out of the new airfield at Truscott on 16th July, four Beaufighters made a successful attack on Maumere. Led by Squadron Leader Boyd,[9] the Beaufighters surprised the enemy by attacking early in the morning, destroying two enemy aircraft which were just about to take off from the airfield. Boyd also destroyed another one which had become airborne. He fired two bursts at a distance of 200 yards and the enemy aircraft, a Nick, went into a vertical dive and crashed into the sea. Boyd then attacked another Nick which he hit but the Japanese pilot broke off the engagement and escaped. The Beaufighters then turned their attention to the shipping in the harbour. They strafed five motor vessels and two naval craft in the face of heavy anti-aircraft fire, but the enemy scored no hits. The Beaufighters in this attack were operating at extreme range and had very little petrol left by the time they landed at Truscott.

At the end of July the usual heavy attacks on airfields were carried out in support of the final landing on western New Guinea at Cape Sansapor. On 29th July No. 79 Wing sent nine Mitchells from No. 2 and twelve from No. 18 against Penfui airfield. They bombed at sunset but the operation was disappointing because cloud almost blanketed the target.

The sorties made by squadrons in North-Western Area in July were:

| Squadron | Sorties |
|---|---|
| No. 1 | 82 |
| No. 2 | 89 |
| No. 18 | 107 |
| No. 31 | 76 |
| No. 54 | 15 |
| No. 380 Group | 335 |
| Total | 704 |

[8] F-Lt C. N. Hill, 406528; 2 and 7 Sqns. Audit clerk; of South Belmont, WA; b. Perth, 25 Sep 1918.

[9] Sqn Ldr J. A. P. Boyd, 400691. 125 Sqn; comd 31 Sqn 1944. Office equipment mechanic; of Melbourne; b. Brighton, Vic, 1 Feb 1915.

Because of the marked enemy weakness in the air, the Spitfire squadrons again had a lean period in July. The Spitfire force in North-Western Area had been increased in that month by the arrival of two more R.A.F. squadrons, mentioned earlier: No. 548 stationed at Livingstone and No. 549, at Strauss. The intention was that these two squadrons would free the Spitfires of No. 80 Wing (Nos. 452 and 457 Squadrons) for the planned invasion of Selaru. As time went by the likelihood of this operation taking place grew less and there was little for the pilots to do except train. There was one clash with the enemy on 20th July when three Spitfires of No. 54 Squadron, stationed at Truscott, caught and destroyed a reconnaissance plane over the Drysdale Mission. On three other occasions Spitfires were sent up to intercept reported raiders but without finding any.

Early in August, the R.A.A.F's first Liberator bomber went into action from Manbulloo. It was piloted by Flying Officer Frecker[1] and made three bombing and strafing runs over a 1,500-ton vessel near the Banda Islands. The bombs missed but hits were scored with machine-gun fire. The vessel opened fire in reply, killing Flying Officer Middleton,[2] the rear gunner. Some days earlier seven Liberators of No. 24 Squadron, the first squadron to be armed with Liberators, had flown from Manbulloo airfield to Darwin where they were to take part in operations with aircraft of No. 380 Bombardment Group. On arrival at Darwin, however, all the aircraft were found to be unserviceable for operations because of mechanical faults, and they returned next day to Manbulloo.

No. 24 Squadron was the first of seven which the R.A.A.F. planned to arm with Liberators. American aircraft production was proceeding at such a pace that there was a surplus, and General Kenney had asked that enough for seven squadrons be given to the R.A.A.F. for duty in North-Western Area. Kenney could then withdraw No. 380 Bombardment Group to New Guinea.

It was originally intended that the first R.A.A.F. Liberator squadron should be No. 99, which was to form in Queensland on 15th March. However, when Kenney ordered the withdrawal of the Vultee Vengeance squadrons from New Guinea, it was decided that these squadrons (Nos. 21, 23 and 24) should not disband but be re-armed and used as the nucleus of the first Liberator squadrons. In January 1944 General Arnold had told General Kenney in Washington that he would let the Australians have twelve Liberators in May and then send an additional six each month beginning in July 1944.

Air Force headquarters realised that it would be difficult to supply experienced aircrews for the Liberators. Few could be obtained from Britain because of the intense operations of R.A.F. Bomber Command there. General Kenney offered Fifth Air Force training facilities, and

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[1] F-Lt M. D. Frecker, DFM, 402653. 115 Sqn RAF, 460 and 24 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Mosman, NSW; b. Brisbane, 14 Aug 1918.

[2] F-O B. J. Middleton, DFM, 408052. 49 Sqn RAF, 24 Sqn. Clerk; of Hobart; b. Subiaco, WA, 15 Dec 1918. Killed in action 5 Aug 1944.

crews to be converted to the Liberators were drawn from squadrons under R.A.A.F. Command and from the instructional staff of flying schools; most of the pilots had had long experience of flying multi-engined aircraft and many had been decorated.

Training had begun as early as December 1943 when five crews started their conversion courses at Charters Towers. These crews went through further training exercises with the 5th Bomber Command Replacement and Training Centre in New Guinea and were then assigned for operational training to the American No. 43 Bombardment Group at Nadzab.

By May 1944 the Liberator flying training program was in full operation. The thirty-days conversion course at Jackson Field, Moresby, could produce between five and ten complete flying crews a month. Advanced technical training equipment and good instructors were available and the R.A.A.F. was given full cooperation by the senior American officers and their staffs. After leaving Jackson Field the crews served with No. 380 Group for a further two months.

By the end of June, the headquarters of No. 24 Squadron moved from Lowood, Queensland, to Manbulloo, Northern Territory. The squadron, equipped with twelve new Liberators, which had been ferried out from America, was ready for operations by 5th July, its commander being Wing Commander J. B. Hampshire.

No. 24 was employed mainly on shipping searches in August. During one of these missions on 25th August a Liberator piloted by Flying Officer Carrigan[3] found and attacked an enemy convoy of merchant vessels in the Molucca Sea. An enemy aircraft was covering the convoy but did not attempt an interception. Carrigan, attacking from 10,000 feet, dropped eight 300-lb bombs scoring two and possibly three direct hits and several near misses on one of the vessels which was left smoking.

Early in August R.A.A.F. Command ordered three of the Liberators to proceed to Hollandia where, on 12th and 22nd August, they picked up reconnaissance parties and dropped them in enemy-held territory in the Vogelkop Peninsula. With three out of its twelve aircraft away on this special work the squadron found it difficult to provide sufficient aircraft for offensive missions. Cole urged that in fairness to the squadron it should be allowed to work together during its early life without providing detachments for special missions.

Ambon which was heavily attacked by Liberators in August was practically destroyed. All the airfield facilities and buildings were flattened and the runways put out of order for a month. Almost daily attacks continued in September.

In September Air Commodore Charlesworth,[4] who had replaced Air Vice-Marshal Cole as air officer commanding, reported that No. 80 Wing was causing him some concern. It had been moved to the Darwin area

[3] F-Lt H. D. Carrigan, DFC, 403122. 159 Sqn RAF, 24 Sqn. Grazier; of Boomi, NSW; b. Maitland, NSW, 10 Feb 1917.

[4] Air Cmdre A. M. Charlesworth, CBE, AFC. Comd RAAF Forward Ech 1943, Eastern Area 1943-44; AOC North-Western Area 1944-46. Regular air force offr; of Laverton, Vic; b. Lottah, Tas, 17 Sep 1903.

but had nothing to do except train. After July, the enemy did not even send reconnaissance aircraft over northern Australia. The spirit of the men was still high but there was a danger of a drop in morale unless they were given some active role in the war. Charlesworth said in a report to Bostock: "I cannot urge too strongly the early employment of it on active operations in some other theatre or its withdrawal to a southern location where personnel may rest."

For twelve months, North-Western Area had supported the Allied advance in New Guinea and to Morotai. The need to give this indirect support overriding attention had meant that on occasions many Japanese shipping targets had to be left unmolested. In June and July the enemy used some 400,000 tons of shipping to reinforce their forces in the islands north of Darwin. While this reinforcement proceeded the main target for the Allied aircraft was Ambon and few aircraft could be spared to attack the enemy ships.

During September, North-Western Area directed its attack against Ceram and southern Celebes. The Liberators of No. 24 Squadron began offensive operations in September, joining with No. 380 Group in combined missions. A substantial part of the group's aircraft taking part in these offensive operations were flown by R.A.A.F. airmen. On one combined operation, 14 of the 24 Liberators were manned by R.A.A.F. crews and on another, 12 out of 24.

The Mitchells and Beaufighters of No. 79 Wing carried out shipping sweeps, and bombing and harassing attacks on enemy centres including Maumere, Tual, Langgur, Larat and Dobo. Although enemy activity was at a low ebb during September, the month was an unfortunate one for the wing, which lost nine aircraft. Of 42 crew members in these lost aircraft only 16 survived.

On 1st September Mitchells of Nos. 2 and 18 Squadrons attacked targets in the Kai Islands. No. 2 found that its objective, Tual, was cloud covered, but they contrived to place their bombs in and close to the town starting a large fire. One of the captains got off course on the return journey and made a forced landing in the sea near Peron Island when his fuel supply gave out. The crew was rescued later, some with minor injuries. Another Mitchell sent out from Hughes to search for the lost aircraft crashed in the same locality, killing two members of the crew. A Beaufighter was lost on 18th September when it crashed into the sea near Broome soon after taking off to provide cover for a Catalina. Two more were lost on a similar mission on 24th September.

Replacement crews for No. 2 Squadron were not arriving in North-Western Area in time to release crews who had completed their operational tours. Not only were replacements slow in arriving but they were not trained on Mitchell aircraft. As a result, towards the end of the month No. 79 Wing found it necessary to suspend nearly all operational flying in both Nos. 2 and 18 Squadrons in order to train and convert seven Hudson replacement crews for No. 2 and ten replacement crews for No. 18 who were not fully trained.

After Sansapor, General MacArthur made ready to move forward again towards Mindanao. There was little to stop him. The next point of attack his planners selected was Morotai Island, which lay midway between New Guinea and Mindanao. Morotai was the logical choice, because it was not too far from Sansapor for fighters to give air cover, and it was weakly held by the Japanese. A landing there would also by-pass the strong enemy concentrations on Halmahera. Morotai lies east of the northern end of Halmahera, and commands the entrance to Kau Bay, which the Japanese had developed extensively. It is a mountainous island which in 1941 had a population of 9,000.

The attack into Morotai was to be preceded by widespread bombardment by aircraft of Admiral Nimitz's Pacific Fleet. The 15th September was to be assault day, and on the same day a force of American marines was to seize Palau in the Caroline Islands. The simultaneous actions would help to divide Japanese reaction, whatever it might be.

Again the S.W.P.A. air forces were to play their part. Beginning on 1st September, they were to carry out heavy daylight raids against enemy air facilities in Ceram, Halmahera and north Celebes and, in addition, to neutralise the Vogelkop airfields. Tasks in the Vogelkop area would be carried out by No. 10 Group. Heavy bombers of the Thirteenth Air Force were also to attack as far north as Davao in Mindanao and as far west as Balikpapan in Borneo.

In their operations in the Vogelkop the Kittyhawks of No. 80 Squadron began carrying a 1,500-lb bomb load, instead of the normal load of 1,000 pounds. The increased load was possible because this squadron had the latest type of Kittyhawks which were more sturdily built. On 3rd September, four aircraft of the squadron dive-bombed Babo in the first operation with the 1,500-lb bomb load, and from then on No. 80 delivered this load in many bombing attacks, mainly against Babo and Kokas. Carrying the extra bomb load, however, shortened the range of the aircraft because it was not possible to carry additional fuel supplies.

The Bostons and Beaufighters with their longer range were used against airfields on Ceram and in the Kai Islands, and for barge sweeps. About half of both squadrons' efforts were concentrated on denying the enemy use of Bula airfield in Ceram and Langgur on the Kai Islands. These attacks produced good results with about 75 per cent of bombs landing on the targets. Minor damage was caused to eight aircraft by anti-aircraft fire. One Boston was found to have forty holes in it when it returned to base after a raid on Bula on 5th September.

The Morotai task force left Aitape on 10th September and arrived in the objective area on 14th September. Before this all hostile aircraft had been cleared out of Palau, Halmahera and the Vogelkop areas. Pacific fleet carrier air strikes had largely neutralised enemy airfields in the Philippines, thereby isolating Morotai from immediate air attack. Naval and air bombardment of the beaches paved the way for the assault force which went ashore at 8.30 a.m. The landing was unopposed. Troops and supplies moved ashore across mud-covered and half-submerged coral

reefs into the coconut trees and scrub which lined the shore. Only a few Japanese were met and all the Americans soon reached the objective line which included the Pitu airfield. Next day six Japanese were killed during light clashes while the troops were pushing towards their final objectives.

Group Captain Rooney's[5] No. 61 Airfield Construction Wing, which had left the Darwin area in August, arrived off Morotai (via Aitape) on 18th September to take part in construction projects on the island. The wing headquarters and the engineers of No. 14 Airfield Construction Squadron went ashore at Pitu Bay, and the following day began work on road repair to the Wama airfield site. By 20th September the squadron had begun work on the Wama airfield itself.

No enemy aircraft came to interfere with the Morotai and Palau landings on 15th September. This was a clear indication of the weakness of available enemy air strength. The possession by the Allies of airfields at Morotai would permit the free use of land-based bomber aircraft over the Philippines, and allow them to seal the Celebes Sea and Macassar Strait.

No. 10 Group was reinforced in September by the addition of No. 81 Wing, which was to have Nos. 76, 77 and 82 Squadrons under its control. Group Captain Steege, who commanded the wing, formed an advanced headquarters at Los Negros on 30th August. Nos. 76 and 77, with No. 79 Spitfire Squadron, had continued through May, June and July to provide fighter protection for the American base in the Admiralties, but by August this was no longer needed, and the Kittyhawk squadrons were transferred to No. 81 Wing, which was absorbed by No. 10 Group.

The equipment and stores of Nos. 76 and 77 Squadrons and No. 27 Air Stores Park had been loaded on the American Liberty ship *Vitus Bering* which had left Los Negros on 13th August. These units with their equipment arrived at Noemfoor on 30th August. When unloading, it was found that much of the equipment had been pilfered and damaged. Between 9th and 12th September, twenty-eight air transports carried ground staff of the two squadrons to Noemfoor, and on 13th September Nos. 76 and 77 Squadrons, flying in wing formation, set out for Wakde on the first stage of their flight to Noemfoor. Before they reached Wakde, however, they were forced to turn back because of heavy cloud. The forty-eight aircraft, led by Steege, set out again at dawn next morning, and reached Noemfoor in the afternoon.

Shortly after its arrival at Noemfoor No. 81 Wing, with Nos. 76 and 77 Squadrons, was ordered to prepare for movement to Morotai as soon as the engineers had prepared a strip there. As a result of this order, the wing remained on six hours' notice with equipment packed ready to move by air transports to Morotai. At the end of September, however, the order was cancelled, and on the 30th twenty-two Kittyhawks of No. 76

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[5] Gp Capt D. J. Rooney, OBE, 250317. Comd 1 Mobile Works Wing 1942-43, 61 Airfield Construction Wing 1943-45. Civil engineer; of Vaucluse, NSW; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 28 Jul 1904.

dive-bombed Babo while eight from No. 77 and ten from No. 80 bombed Samate.

Throughout the month squadrons of No. 78 Wing had continued their operations against the Vogelkop airfields. The squadrons completed 1,120 operational sorties of all kinds, and 216 tons of bombs and 278,000 rounds of ammunition were expended during the month. Enemy airstrips within the radius of action which the wing attacked included Samate, Jefman, Babo, Utarom, Ransiki, Faan and Langgur, all of which had been put out of action. Following is an analysis of the efforts of each squadron for the month:

No. 75 Squadron 375 sorties 1,075 hours
No. 78 Squadron 363 sorties 1,046 hours
No. 80 Squadron 382 sorties 1,148 hours

No. 30 Squadron flew 159 sorties and No. 22 Squadron 129 sorties.

Meanwhile, on 4th October at Morotai, Wama airfield, on which Nos. 3 and 14 Airfield Construction Squadrons had been working, was opened for flying and a squadron of American Lightnings arrived. The next move by the men of the South-West Pacific Area was to be the invasion of the Philippines, and in the coming struggle Morotai would provide a valuable base for Allied aircraft.

While MacArthur's spearhead was thrust towards the Philippine Islands his naval, army and air forces had to cope with the problem of providing security to the rear bases. The strength of the *XVIII Japanese Army* cut off in the Wewak area was still considerable and it seemed likely to MacArthur's staff that General Adachi, its commander, would attempt to break out and attack Allied defences at Aitape. During the latter half of May and through June there was increased enemy patrol activity and movement. Elements of the *XVIII Army* were carrying out careful probings of the American positions. Allied Intelligence estimated that the enemy could prepare a combat force of 20,000 men and there was an added strength of about 11,000 in the Wewak area.

The Fifth Air Force, meanwhile, had continued to bomb and strafe the enemy at Wewak and in May No. 71 Wing, R.A.A.F., together with the air echelons of Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons, left Kiriwina-Goodenough and moved to Nadzab where they, too, joined in the bombardment. At Nadzab the wing came under the control of No. 10 Group.

The first missions of the Beauforts were flown on 9th May and during the month No. 8 Squadron flew 143 operational sorties and No. 100 flew 146. Results of the bombing were often difficult to assess, but it was learned that considerable damage had been done to Japanese supply dumps and to equipment and bivouac areas.

On one of these missions on 20th May a Beaufort of No. 100 Squadron, piloted by Flying Officer MacLaren,[6] with Flying Officer Anderson[7]

[6] F-O L. M. MacLaren, 416874; 100 Sqn. Clerk; of Kingswood, SA; b. Wagin, SA, 17 Jan 1916. Killed in action 20 May 1944.

[7] F-O S. L. Anderson, 410192; 100 Sqn. Clerk; of Canterbury, Vic; b. Moonee Ponds, Vic, 13 Jan 1918. Killed in action 20 May 1944.

as navigator and Flying Officer Graetz[8] and Flight Sergeant Maloney[9] as wireless air gunners, was hit by anti-aircraft fire while striking enemy supply lines in the coastal area. One of the engines caught fire and the pilot came down in the sea about twenty yards offshore from But plantation. The crew, who were injured, took to their dinghy and paddled seaward, but Japanese soldiers opened fire from the shore with machine-guns as soon as the dinghy left the shelter of the aircraft. Anderson and MacLaren were killed by the machine-gun fire which sank the dinghy and carried away a lobe of Graetz's right ear. Graetz started to swim westward and eventually landed on the west side of the But jetty. Maloney was last seen by Graetz swimming seaward.

For the following eight days Graetz was in the jungle avoiding Japanese patrols, and the information he collected on enemy positions and movements later proved valuable. He was seen on 28th May near the Danmap River by American Airacobra pilots and later picked up by a patrol boat and taken to Aitape.

For a time, Kittyhawks of No. 10 Group and Airacobras of No. 110 American Squadron operating from Aitape aided in the attacks on the Japanese in the Wewak area, but by the end of May the Kittyhawks had moved to Hollandia. In June Nos. 8, 100 and 30 Squadrons were called forward to Aitape. They were under the command of Wing Commander Moran, and, on 22nd June, when Air Commodore Scherger left to take over the air task force at Noemfoor he handed over control of the Aitape Air Task Force to Moran, an experienced regular officer. All the equipment and supplies for the wing had to be transported to Aitape by air lift. Moran used his Beauforts as well as Dakotas to move the squadrons which were forced to operate on minimum facilities. All bombs, petrol and much of the food came from American stocks. Even the vehicles to carry aircrews from their tents to the airfield were supplied by the Americans. In spite of these difficulties the Beauforts were able to maintain a high rate of flying effort. The Beaufighters, although handicapped by a lack of spare parts which resulted in many being out of order, also flew a large number of sorties. They began operations from Tadji on 10th June attacking barges plying between Wewak and Muschu Island. They destroyed eighteen in twenty-one days.[1]

Towards the end of June the Beaufort squadrons were flying an average of thirty-three operational sorties daily. Their targets included bomb and fuel dumps, stores, motor transport, troop assembly areas, gun positions and bridges. Night sorties were carried out in cooperation with the patrol torpedo boats. In the thirty days from 7th June to 6th July No. 71 Wing mounted 495 sorties.

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[8] F-Lt R. A. Graetz, MC, 417175; 100 Sqn. Aircraft assembler; of Springton, SA; b. Mt Pleasant, SA, 10 Dec 1917.

[9] F-Sgt F. Maloney, 410995; 100 Sqn. Fitter and turner; of Coolamon, NSW; b. Coolamon, 1 Aug 1918. Killed in action 20 May 1944.

[1] The commander of the squadron, W Cdr P. L. B. Gibson (of Sydney) was killed in an aircraft accident on the airfield on 11th June. He was succeeded by F-Lt J. T. Sandford.

By the end of June it was known that the Japanese were preparing for an attack on Aitape. The Allies therefore heavily reinforced this base, widening the ring of defences and stationing two battalions to the east in the Driniumor River area. Major-General Charles P. Hall, commanding the XI Corps, had the 32nd American Division at Aitape, and the 43rd American Division was in the process of moving in. He planned a vigorous attack to counter the enemy assault.

Close air support was available from Moran's force which comprised the following squadrons:

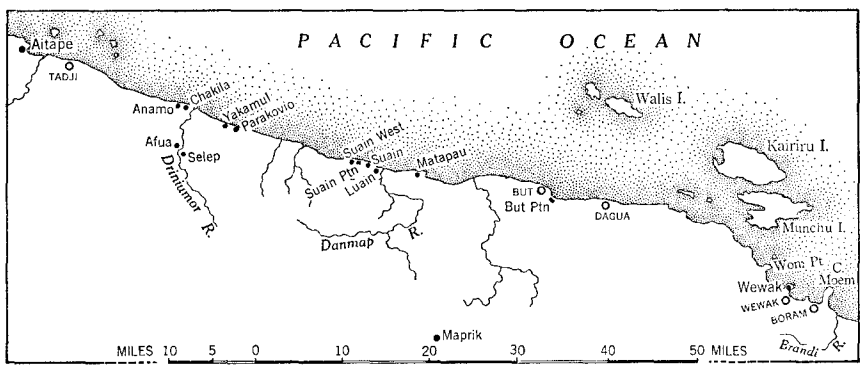
R.A.A.F.

No. 8 Beaufort (Squadron Leader Hamblin)
No. 100 Beaufort (Wing Commander Thompson[2])
No. 30 Beaufighter (Flight Lieutenant Sandford)

Fifth Air Force

No. 110 Reconnaissance Squadron

Early in July American patrols clashed with Japanese parties some of which had as many as fifty men. The massing of enemy troops for the offensive presented many targets for the Australian aircraft. Moran sent




strike after strike against concentrations. Eight Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron raided the headquarters of the *20th Japanese Division* at Suain on 3rd July, dropping sixteen 500-lb bombs. On the same day four Beaufighters looking for targets of opportunity struck at barges on Muschu Island, stores and petrol dumps, trucks and staff cars. The Australian aircraft also attacked bridges, particularly the Brandi River bridge, in efforts to disrupt enemy traffic.

Immediately Adachi had learned of the Allied assault at Hollandia and Aitape, he made up his mind to recapture these bases. He soon realised, however, that this was impossible and had limited his aim to "retaining Allied strength towards the east and, if possible, to recapture Aitape". One reason, apparently, for mounting an immediate offensive was that

[2] W Cdr R. H. Thompson, DFC, 260285. Comd 100 Sqn 1942 and 1943-44, 14 Sqn 1944-45. Of Kirribilli, NSW; b. Sydney, 7 Jun 1918.

the *XVIII Army's* food would be very short by October and Adachi wanted to make a contribution to the overall war effort while there was sufficient food left. A total of 17,000 troops of the *20th* and *41st Divisions* were to be used. Before the assault could begin, however, some thousands of men engaged in building up supplies of food and material had been lost through malnutrition, malaria and other diseases.[3]

The launching of the attack had to be postponed until July because of the supply problem. Then at midnight on the 10th July the Japanese struck. They came in screaming waves at the thinly-held front of the 128th Infantry, 2,000 yards south of the Driniumor River mouth. American machine-gunners killed several hundred but the Japanese were willing to pay the high cost in lives and forced a penetration, overrunning American positions. By dawn on 11th July they had at least a regiment west of the Driniumor moving north towards Anamo on the coast.

The American ground commanders now called on Moran for a maximum air effort and at first light an almost-uninterrupted air bombardment by the Beauforts, Beaufighters, and the Airacobras of No. 110 Squadron began. The aircraft concentrated their efforts in the immediate battle areas, giving direct support by hitting at anything that moved on the ground, the Beauforts flying a total of twenty-nine sorties between dawn and dusk. Next day the Beaufighters machine-gunned troops from Afua to Selep while the Beauforts, flying fifty-one sorties, bombed along the Driniumor and near-by villages. Most of the targets were only from twelve to twenty miles from the airfield at Aitape and sorties took only half an hour's flying. Each Beaufort crew was flying four trips a day involving a tremendous effort by the overworked armourers, reloading the aircraft with bombs and ammunition after each flight. At the peak of their efforts the Beaufort squadrons were flying sixty sorties a day.

The Japanese barge traffic had long since been restricted to moving at night and one of the main tasks of the Beaufighters was to operate against these. Some of the pilots, including Sandford, the squadron commander, had flown on night-fighter operations in Britain and were therefore familiar with night flying. Strafing attacks at night were made only against waterborne targets, the strafing run being commenced from not less than 800 feet. On 13th July Sandford and Flight Lieutenant Satchwell[4] attacked a barge near Muschu Island and Sandford saw tracer ammunition from the barge hitting Satchwell's aircraft. Satchwell told Sandford on the radio, "I think I'm on fire", and then his aircraft crashed into the sea. An hour later another Beaufighter left Tadji to attack barges and failed to return. At dawn two more Beaufighters took off to make harassing attacks along the coast towards Wewak and while over Boram, Squadron Leader Fenton's[5] machine was hit by anti-aircraft fire and

[3] Lt-Col Tanaka, staff officer *XVIII Army* (interrogation, GHQ Historical Division, Tokyo).

[4] F-Lt C. A. Satchwell, 400736. 456 and 30 Sqns. Clerk; of Balwyn, Vic; b. Footscray, Vic, 3 Feb 1920. Killed in action 13 Jul 1944.

[5] Sqn Ldr G. K. Fenton, 250666; 30 Sqn. Warehouseman; of Oakleigh, Vic; b. Carlton, Vic, 21 Oct 1915. Killed in action 13 Jul 1944.

crashed, killing the crew. No. 30 Squadron in one day had lost six men including their commander and three Beaufighters.

On 14th July a naval task force under the command of Commodore Collins,[6] R.A.N., and consisting of the cruisers *Australia* and *Shropshire* and the destroyers *Arunta, Warramunga, Ammen* and *Bache,* joined in the operations in support of the American ground forces, and bombarded enemy positions along the coast. Beauforts of No. 71 Wing spotted for the naval gunners.

Meanwhile, the Americans had withdrawn west of the Driniumor but a counter-attack on 13th July supported by artillery regained their lost positions and the task of destroying enemy forces cut off west of the Driniumor began. In the intense fighting that followed the Japanese executed a number of uncoordinated attacks. Their *51st Division* attempted to turn the south flank near Afua and attack the Aitape installations from the south and south-east but the manoeuvre was foiled.

By 25th July the bulk of the 43rd American Division had disembarked from New Zealand and was ready to take over the Aitape defences thus releasing garrison troops which then reinforced the Driniumor line. Information from prisoners indicated that the strength of the enemy regiments was seriously depleted and there were grave shortages of food and medical supplies. A large number of the men of the *51st Division* were ill with fever and malnutrition.

Moran's aircraft continued to hammer defence positions with fragmentation bombs, destroyed bridges, ammunition dumps and machine-gunned troops, huts, and barges. Sometimes they could see the enemy troops and targets and gain some idea of the results of their attacks, but in general the effect of their bombing could not be determined accurately because of the thick jungle which the Japanese used to advantage in hiding their positions and supplies. Results were sometimes established later by reports from ground troops. A Japanese prisoner of war said that seventy Japanese had been killed in a raid on Luain on 19th July when ten Beauforts of No. 100 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Plenty,[7] had attacked this target with fragmentation bombs.

During July the aircraft of No. 71 Wing flew a total of 1,510 sorties and dropped 670 tons of bombs. The effort of each squadron was:

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| No. 8 | Squadron | 418 | strike sorties |
| No. 100 | „ | 468 | „ „ |
| No. 30 | „ | 120 | „ „ |
| No. 110 | „ | 504 | „ „ |

The fighting continued into August. On 2nd August the Americans attacked southwards and a week later turned west in an attempt to encircle the remnants of the enemy forces. By 10th August all organised

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[6] Vice-Adm Sir John Collins, KBE, CB; RAN. (1917-18: HMS *Canada.*) Comd HMAS's *Sydney* 1939-41, *Shropshire* 1943-44, Aust Sqn 1944, 1945-46; First Naval Member and CNS 1948-55. B. Deloraine, Tas, 7 Jan 1899.

[7] W Cdr H. C. Plenty, DFC, 582. 21, 2, 8, 14 and 100 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Warnertown, SA; b. Port Pirie, SA, 7 Feb 1921.

enemy resistance in the Aitape area had ended. The *XVIII Japanese Army* had suffered a heavy setback.

General Hall considered that the action of Moran's squadrons during the fighting "in a large measure contributed to the success of the operation by continuous interruption of enemy lines of communication and bombing and strafing of enemy concentrations and supplies. . . . The officers and men of these squadrons have demonstrated their ability and determination to destroy the enemy."

The efforts of the Beauforts had reached their peak early in August. On the 7th, No. 8 Squadron carried out a total of sixty-four sorties against enemy troops—the highest number of sorties carried out in a day by a Beaufort squadron. The first sortie was at 10.45 a.m. and the last at 5.45 p.m., and the Beauforts dropped a total of 390 bombs.

Through August and September the Beauforts continued their daily bombardment of the enemy. They struck at Wewak, Boram, Maprik, Cape Moem and the Danmap River area and many other targets. On 26th August a heavy strike was carried out on the Boram airfield.

Early in September American Airacobras on reconnaissance discovered that the Japanese were filling in craters in the Wewak airfield and 2,000 feet of the runway was serviceable. Evidently the enemy planned to stage aircraft into the stranded garrison. Moran ordered a maximum effort against the airfield. On 11th September, No. 100 Squadron carried out an "all-out" operation against it. The crews called the operation the "Wewak Welter". Forty sorties were made throughout the day from 5.27 a.m. until 5.10 in the afternoon. Ten crews took part and all flew four sorties each. Eighty direct hits were seen on the runway by aircraft stationed to observe results, and the airfield was put out of action.

CHAPTER 16

# AUSTRALIANS IN BURMA

IN August 1942 there had been 250 members of the Royal Australian Air Force serving in the Burma-India theatre. By January 1943 this figure had risen to 350, and by June 1943 to 500. These men, mostly aircrew, were scattered through a large number of Royal Air Force squadrons and units, since no purely Australian air force formations had been sent to this area. In some R.A.F. squadrons, notably Nos. 11, 45 and 113, there were more Australian than other British aircrew. No. 11 (Bomber) Squadron, with a representation of nearly 90 per cent of Australians in its aircrew strength, came to be known as the "Australian Squadron in the R.A.F.".[1] It was commanded by Wing Commander Stumm,[2] a former Rhodes Scholar and barrister of Queensland.

In December of 1942, after building up his resources during the monsoon, General Wavell, Commander-in-Chief in India, had opened a campaign in the Arakan area of Burma. It had, as its objective, the capture of the airfields on Akyab, an island off the end of the Mayu Peninsula. It was to have been a seaborne expedition, but Wavell had not been provided with the necessary vessels to carry out the landing operations. The China-India-Burma theatre was subordinate in importance both to the European theatre and to the Pacific, and therefore, had a low priority for fighting men and equipment.

At this stage the outline plans generally assumed that the Allies would secure a lodgment on the China coast by way of operations across the central Pacific or from Australia by way of the Philippines, rather than from India and Burma. Moreover, when allocations of men and equipment had been made to this theatre, they had to be sent along a line of supply stretching back to the United States and Britain, via the Cape, using vessels which were in constant demand and were therefore allotted only after much argument over priorities. Not only did Wavell's command have a low priority for means, but such forces as he did acquire might suddenly be ordered to other theatres. In mid-1942, for example, much of the available American Tenth Air Force under General Brereton, had been ordered from India to the Middle East when Field Marshal Rommel threatened to break through to Alexandria and the Suez Canal.

Wavell had considered it important to move swiftly in the campaign to seize Akyab in order to forestall Japanese reinforcement of this lightly-garrisoned area. However, bad weather delayed the 14th Indian Division, which made the attack, and it was not until mid-December that the advance had begun through the difficult jungle and mountain country of

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[1] No. 11 Sqn RAF had been transferred from the Western Desert soon after General Auchinleck's operation CRUSADER was successful, in December 1941. See J. Herington's *The Air War Against Germany and Italy 1939-1943*, in this series.

[2] W Cdr H. C. Stumm, DFC, 70656 RAF. Comd 11 Sqn RAF 1943-44, 43 Sqn RAF 1944; b. Gympie, Qld, 29 Aug 1913. Killed in aircraft accident 13 May 1944.

the Arakan. There were further delays, and when, on 6th January 1943, the advance was resumed, the Japanese had been reinforced and were well dug in. They repulsed an attack by the 47th Brigade on positions at Donbaik. A brigade of the 14th Division attacked again at Donbaik on 18th March but the operation failed, and later all forward troops were withdrawn.

After these reverses, the 14th Division did not regain the initiative. The Japanese forces, using infiltration tactics, established themselves in strength on the road between Maungdaw and Buthidaung, forcing the withdrawal on the 7th May 1943 of the British and Indian forces in Buthidaung. Infiltration continued and the British and Indian forces withdrew also from Maungdaw, so that by the start of the monsoon, they were approximately in the same positions from which they had advanced five months earlier.

On the ground, the operations had fallen short of Wavell's hopes. But the Allies had succeeded, in this period, in expanding their air forces, and in passing from the defensive to the offensive. The objectives of the air force operations during the Arakan campaign had been:

(*a*) To establish and maintain air superiority in Burma.
(*b*) To support the operations of the army.
(*c*) To disrupt enemy communications in Burma.
(*d*) To defend India against air attack.
(*e*) To supply from the air, forces which could not be supplied by normal means.

To achieve these objectives, Air Chief Marshal Peirse, the Air Officer Commanding in India, had some 34 squadrons of the R.A.F. and Indian Air Force, while the American Tenth Air Force, divided between India and China, deployed one heavy-bomber, one medium-bomber and two fighter groups.[3] The R.A.F., which was engaged heavily in supporting the ground operations in the Arakan, also carried a share of responsibility for the defence of Allied airfields and offensive attacks on Japanese bases. The Tenth Air Force was not involved in the land battles, but concentrated on defending its airfields in Assam and challenging the Japanese air force in northern Burma so as to protect the "Hump" air route to China. In addition, the Tenth attempted to prevent Japanese supplies and reinforcements coming in ships through the Andaman Sea or crossing overland from Siam, and to disrupt Japanese communications between Rangoon and the battle front in the far north.

For the attack on the Arakan front, most of the Hurricane squadrons of the R.A.F. flew from the Calcutta zone across the Bay of Bengal to bases in and around Chittagong. Soon after the Hurricanes had left Calcutta, the Japanese air force carried out a number of night raids and, although their sorties were few, they caused considerable disruption and an estimated 1,500,000 fled the city. Peirse made an urgent demand for night fighters and a flight of Beaufighters was sent from the Middle East.

[3] An American heavy-bomber group held 32 aircraft in 4 sqns; a medium-bomber group, 52 aircraft in 4 sqns; a fighter group, 75 aircraft in 3 sqns.

In subsequent night raids, the Beaufighters routed the attacking Japanese and the threat to Calcutta subsided.

The effectiveness of the Beaufighters and their crews may be illustrated by an engagement between Japanese aircraft and a Beaufighter, piloted by Flying Officer Crombie,[4] an Australian, with Warrant Officer Moss,[5] R.A.F., as navigator. On the 19th January at 8.45 p.m., they intercepted four Army Type-97 bombers, flying in a diamond formation at Budge Budge, south of Calcutta. On the approach of the Beaufighter, all four Japanese aircraft opened fire from 400 yards and Crombie's starboard motor was hit and set on fire. However, Crombie continued into the attack and shot one down. The flames from the burning motor were now sweeping back, so he ordered Moss to bale out. Crombie continued to attack and destroyed a second bomber, and then turned his attention to the third. By this time his aircraft was blazing, but, not to be denied, he went into the attack and so badly damaged the third enemy aircraft that it could not have reached its base. Crombie then turned to seek a fourth enemy, but his petrol tank exploded and he had to bale out. His clothing was alight but he landed safely in water, twenty miles from Calcutta. He walked for three or four hours when he reached an army unit which returned him to his squadron at 4 a.m. next day.

Meanwhile, from Chittagong, the Hurricane fighter squadrons had been flying over the advancing columns in the Arakan, protecting them from enemy interference from the air and attacking targets on the ground including enemy-held villages.

When, in March, the Japanese army counter-attacked, the R.A.F. redoubled its efforts in support of the ground forces, the Hurricanes alone mounting as many as 150 sorties in a day. Then the Japanese Army Air Force struck in an attempt to cripple the R.A.F. at its forward bases by destroying its aircraft on the ground. At first, mainly because of the poor air warning system, the Japanese achieved slight success against the Chittagong airfields, destroying a few British aircraft. The enemy bombers attacked with fighter escorts and the defending Hurricanes did well to exact losses equal to their own.

The R.A.F. defeated this onslaught, and when this had been accomplished, Air Vice-Marshal Williams,[6] the commander of Bengal Command, ordered counter-measures, which took the form of daylight bombing of enemy airfields with Blenheims and night bombing with Wellingtons and Liberators. With the arrival of the monsoon the Japanese had withdrawn from their forward airfields because of difficulties created mainly by the weather. Their operations now had to be staged from Siam through

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[4] Sqn Ldr C. A. Crombie, DSO, DFC, 404099. 25, 89 and 176 Sqns RAF. Jackeroo; of Warwick, Qld; b. Brisbane, 16 Mar 1914. Died 26 Aug 1945, from injuries received in aircraft accident.

[5] F-Lt R. C. Moss, DFC, 174241 RAF. 25, 89 and 176 Sqns RAF. Regular airman; of Deptford, London, Eng; b. Deptford, 7 Aug 1917.

[6] Air Marshal Sir Thomas Williams, KCB, OBE, MC, DFC (1914-18: Sth African Inf and RAF.) Comd RAF Stn Watton 1940-41; SASO 2 Gp 1941; Deputy SASO Bomber Cmd 1941-42; AOC RAF Bengal Cd 1943; Deputy Cmdr, Air Cd South-East Asia 1944; Assistant CAS (Operations) 1944-47. Regular air force offr; b. 27 Sep 1899.

the forward airfields. The enemy bombers were thus less exposed to British attack but their effectiveness was much reduced.

Air attacks on enemy communications in Burma included strikes on railways (marshalling yards, bridges, rolling stock), on road bridges, river craft, transports and depots. Generally the R.A.F. bombers attacked short-range targets up to 250 miles from forward airfields, while the Americans attacked the more distant objectives. Hurricanes, as well as escorting the bombers on strikes, harried enemy vehicles on Burmese roads and craft on the rivers, and soon, hardly a bullock cart or boat could move except at night.

On the 22nd May 1943, before withdrawing his air forces from offensive operations for the period of the monsoon, the enemy made a final attack on the Chittagong airfields. Twenty-five bombers, flying at 19,000 feet and escorted by eleven fighters, took part, but the enemy achieved little and were surprised by Hurricanes, which were at 23,000 feet when the raiders came over Chittagong and destroyed seven of the enemy and damaged many more for a loss of two.

In addition to the Arakan operation, Wavell had planned to use his IV Corps (17th and 23rd Indian Divisions) in an advance into Burma, where it would establish itself on the Chindwin River between Kalewa and Sittaung. The purpose of this operation was to assist the advance of Chinese forces into northern Burma by engaging as many Japanese troops as possible. The Chinese were to occupy north-eastern Burma on the line Myitkyina-Bhamo-Lashio, with the object of covering the construction of a road from Ledo to China which was being built by American engineers. However, General Stilwell, the American who commanded the Chinese army forces, had informed Wavell, in February 1943, that the Chinese troops, on orders from Chiang Kai-shek, would not take part in the operation.[7] Since the only strategic purpose of the IV Corps' operation was to aid the Chinese advance, Wavell called off the operation and limited the corps' activities to strong offensive patrolling.

Wavell had also approved Brigadier Wingate's[8] plan to penetrate upper Burma with his 77th Brigade and sever the enemy's line of supply to Myitkyina. There was no strategic justification for this operation when the Chinese campaign was cancelled, but Wavell agreed that Wingate's operations should take place, as planned, in order to gain experience of the working of columns behind the enemy lines. One-third of the 77th Brigade was lost but valuable lessons were learnt. Supply dropping by air was carried out to maintain the force, some 300 tons being dropped without the loss of an aircraft.

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[7] In Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV, p. 436, Herbert Weaver and Lee Bowen wrote: "The British objected to proposals for enlarging the Chinese army . . . and thus gave offence to the Generalissimo, who lost his enthusiasm for the proposed attack. Chiang Kai-shek had placed a condition on the cooperation of his Yunnan force, which was that the ground offensives should be coordinated with naval operations in the Andaman Sea, a possibility eliminated by the decision to invade North Africa in November 1942."

[8] Maj-Gen O. C. Wingate, DSO. Comd Long Range Penetration Gps, Burma 1943-44. Regular soldier; b. Naini Tal, United Provinces, India, 26 Feb 1903. Killed in aircraft accident 24 Mar 1944.

The failure in Arakan, together with the rigours of the unhealthy climate, had a depressing effect on morale. When General Auchinleck[9] replaced Field Marshal Wavell as commander-in-chief in India in June 1943, his first task was to restore the morale of his army and infuse an offensive spirit by training and indoctrination. During the period of the monsoon—June to November—nothing of importance was attempted on land by either side; operations were confined to extensive patrolling. In the air, however, the R.A.F. and the Tenth Air Force continued to be as active as the weather allowed, and prepared for the dry weather by training and by building up reserve supplies. It was found that unless the all-weather airfields were actually flooded, large-scale air operations could be undertaken safely even at the height of the monsoon. Weather forecasting had improved considerably and over central Burma it was generally possible to locate targets on enemy lines of communication. The Japanese, however, discontinued air operations and withdrew their units for training, rest and re-equipment during the monsoon.

The China-Burma-India theatre had a complex command structure with resulting friction between personalities. There was no unity of command. The situation produced wide divergencies in strategic aims and the proposed methods of achieving these aims. General Stilwell clashed with General Chennault, who enjoyed the special confidence of Chiang Kai-shek; Stilwell disliked Chiang Kai-shek.

The Generalissimo was suspicious of British influence over the India-based Tenth Air Force, whose commander, General Clayton L. Bissell, also commanded Chennault's China-based Air Task Force. Chiang Kai-shek represented to President Roosevelt, early in 1943, that Chennault was "a man of genius" who enjoyed the confidence of the Chinese people and that he should have an air force of his own. He got it. The Fourteenth Air Force, with Chennault as its commander, came into being in March 1943, but it was dependent on air lift from India for its supply.[1] For that reason, General Arnold had been opposed to the separation of the American air formations in China-Burma-India theatres, but such was Chiang's influence at Washington that he was able to obtain this command for Chennault.

The British favoured a campaign to recover central Burma and Malaya. Stilwell favoured a campaign in northern Burma to open a land route

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[9] Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, GCB, GCIE, CSI, DSO, OBE. C-in-C India 1941, 1943-46; C-in-C ME 1941-42. Regular soldier; b. 21 Jun 1884.

[1] Commenting on the activation of the Fourteenth Air Force in *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Volume IV, page 440, Herbert Weaver and Lee Bowen wrote: "From a purely military point of view, the activation of the Fourteenth Air Force on 10 March 1943, was patently premature. The CATF, though not formally assigned to the Fourteenth until 24 April, became an independent command with its operational sphere extended to include the area north of the Yangtze, but responsibility for its supply remained with the Tenth Air Force, while extension of the offensive action of the fledgling air force depended upon the ability of the ATC [Air Transport Command] to increase its Hump traffic. On the other hand, Chennault had won a greater freedom of action in reward for his outstanding operational successes, and this, together with the promise of a substantial increase in Hump tonnage, of the early arrival of a heavy bombardment group, and of planes for the Chinese Air Force, brought a badly needed boost to morale in China. The action served also to bolster the prestige of the Generalissimo."

into China. Chennault opposed Stilwell's plan contending that the reconquest of Burma and the building of a new road across the mountains could only prolong the war and use up resources which might otherwise be used to build airfields and supply China by air. Chennault believed that, with a strong American air force in China, he could destroy the Japanese air formations there and thus speed the advance of American forces in the Pacific to the China coast.

These conflicting views were aired in May 1943, at the TRIDENT conference in Washington between President Roosevelt and Mr Churchill and their staffs. The argument is described in the history of the American Army Air Forces:

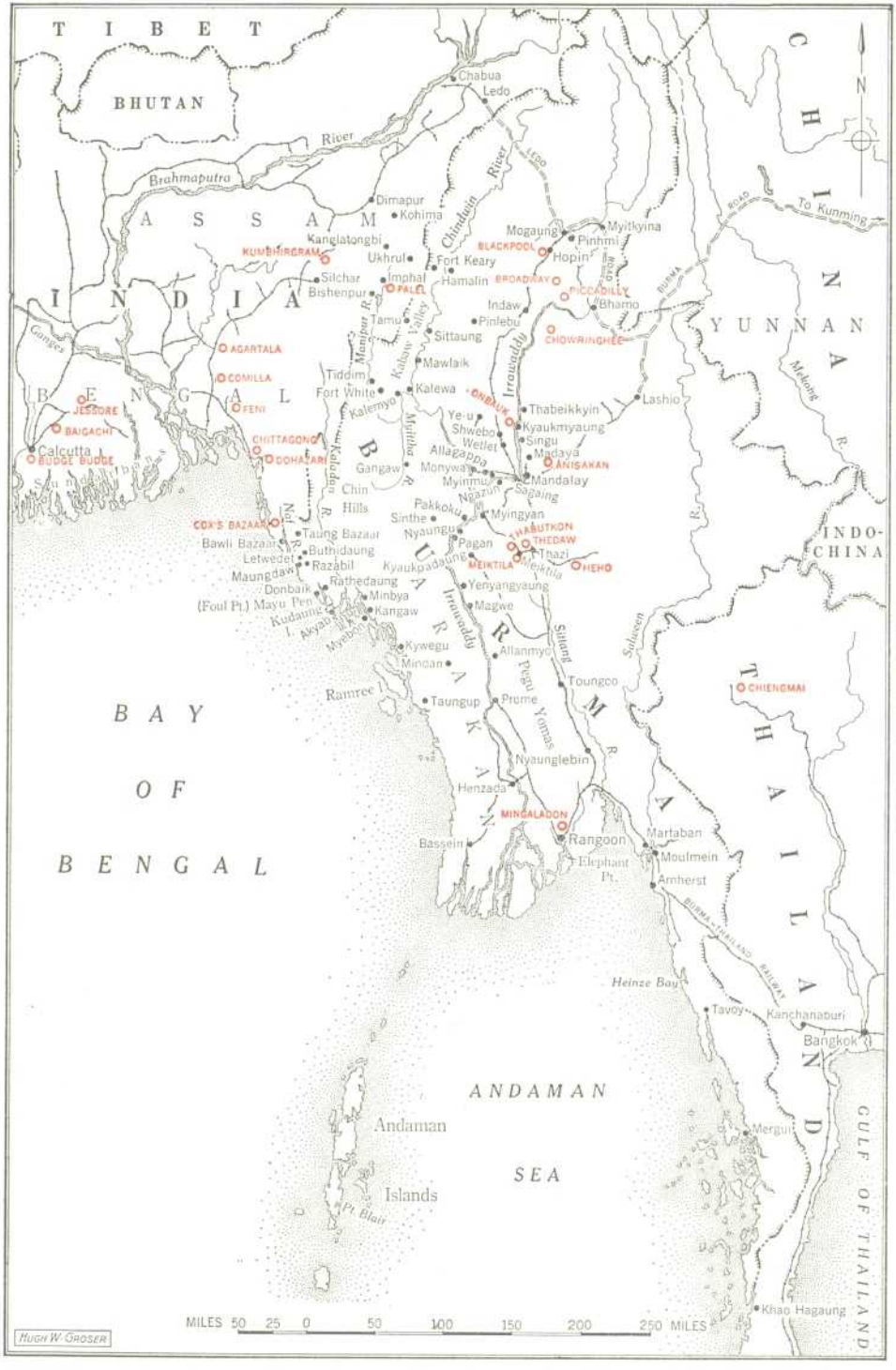
> At TRIDENT the perplexities of the CBI [China-Burma-India area] received a thorough airing. Stilwell and Chennault, in presentations broken at points by bitter exchanges, agreed only insofar as they both expected aerial operations of gigantic proportions to be mounted eventually against Japan from bases in China. Stilwell continued to argue that the Hump flight could never be developed to a point removing the basic necessity for a land supply line to China. Until the Ledo Road had been completed, Chinese land forces in Yunnan should be given the bulk of the air freight in support of their part in the reconquest of northern Burma, an operation which retained first claim on available resources. Chennault argued that the Burma campaign would be long drawn out and that China might collapse before its completion. Taking a cue perhaps from certain proposals currently under discussion for a counterstrategy to that set forth for the Pacific in MacArthur's RENO plan, Chennault also argued that the seizure of a port city on the China coast would be a more practical approach to the problem of getting forces into China for the final destruction of Japan. Every effort, therefore, should be made to build up the airlift for support primarily of the Fourteenth Air Force, which was in position not only to aid the Chinese immediately, but to make extensive inroads into enemy merchant shipping and to do great damage to land supply, aerial installations, and troop concentrations. Development of air bases in Assam should be given priority over the Ledo Road. He had no fear that the Japanese might capture American bases in China, and he looked forward to a successful aerial offensive preparing the way for an Allied landing on the China coast.[2]

The decision at the TRIDENT conference was that the air cargo route would have the highest priority, and Chennault was promised the bulk of the freight. The aim was to increase the airlift to China to a monthly capacity of 10,000 tons by the autumn of 1943. Stilwell's proposed Burma offensive was postponed until after the monsoon and was to be coordinated with amphibious operations to retake Akyab and Ramree Island. It soon became evident that the airlift objective of 10,000 tons monthly could not be reached. It was impossible to prepare sufficient airfields in Assam and faults developed in the Commando transport aircraft supplied for the airlift. Thus the plans for the immediate assistance of China fell through; during July only 3,451 tons (as against a target figure of 7,000 tons) were actually delivered to China.

The R.A.F. operations in India and Burma were conducted by four groups—Nos. 221, 222, 224 and 225. Nos. 222 and 225 Groups, located

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[2] Craven and Cate, Vol IV, p. 442.




Burma Airfields.

at Colombo and Bangalore respectively, were under Air Headquarters, India Command, while Nos. 221 at Calcutta and 224 at Chittagong were under Air Headquarters, Bengal. These two latter groups were under the direct command of Air Vice-Marshal Williams. The majority of Australian aircrew in the India-Burma theatre were serving in Nos. 221 and 224 Groups, whose squadrons were concentrated mainly on the forward airfields and around Calcutta. By June 1943 the R.A.F. had a total of 52 squadrons, including transport squadrons, in the Burma-India theatre. Of these, 18 were fighter squadrons and 11 light bombers. The fighter squadrons were equipped with Hurricanes and Mohawks; the heavy bombers with Liberators; the medium bombers with Wellingtons, and the light bombers with Blenheims and Vultee Vengeances and Bisleys. Between June and November 1943 aircraft strength grew from 2,453 to 3,699. In July 1943, the total manpower in the R.A.F. and its followers was 93,000, of whom approximately 4,000 were aircrew; in November the total was 119,000, of whom 5,472 were aircrew. In the same period the United States Air Force increased in strength from 185 aircraft to 265, of which 210 were ready for combat.

There had also been rapid development of airfields in the theatre. In March 1942, there were four airfields with all-weather runways. By the end of the monsoon of 1943 there were 285 airfields completed and more were under construction. At the forward airfields at Agartala, Comilla, Feni and Chittagong, the R.A.F. had five Hurricane squadrons, one Beaufighter, one Blenheim (No. 11) and one Bisley squadron (No. 113). At Cox's Bazaar, a detachment of another Hurricane squadron was located, while in Assam there were only two squadrons—one Bisley and one Mohawk. At second-line airfields at Jessore and in the vicinity of Calcutta there were three bomber squadrons (two Wellington—No. 99 and No. 215, which was commanded by an Australian, Wing Commander French[3]), five fighter squadrons (the bulk of which were for the defence of Calcutta), one photo reconnaissance squadron and one transport squadron. Three Vultee Vengeance squadrons were undergoing training. Until the weather improved at the end of September, these dispositions remained substantially unchanged.

In April 1943, an R.A.A.F. liaison office was established in India under the command of Wing Commander Pape,[4] a Melbourne barrister.[5] Its functions were to conduct liaison with the R.A.F. in India on matters of policy and, in particular, the implementation of the Empire Air Training Scheme agreement. He was also to concern himself with equipment and medical matters and with the introduction of the R.A.A.F. paybook system.

[3] W Cdr D. J. French, DFC, 36129 RAF, 257540. 50, 106, 207 and 97 Sqns RAF, 455 Sqn and 108 Sqn RAF; comd ARC Karachi 1942, 215 Sqn RAF 1943. Regular air force offr; of Brighton, Vic; b. Melbourne, 16 Dec 1915.

[4] W Cdr G. A. Pape, 251546. Comd RAAF LO, India, 1943-45. Barrister (later a judge of Supreme Court of Victoria). Of Melbourne; b. Windsor, Vic, 29 Jan 1903.

[5] Other members of the original staff were: *medical officer*, Sqn Ldr K. E. Rex (of Toorak, Vic); *Staff Officer Personnel*, F-Lt H. C. MacIntosh (Willaura, Vic); *historical narrator*, F-Lt N. K. Welsh (Wagga Wagga, NSW); *equipment officer*, F-O A. W. Thomson (Malvern, Vic).

One of the first problems with which Pape had to deal was the question of "dominionisation" of the Australian air force men in India. The Australian Government wished that the Australians should be concentrated overseas in Australian squadrons and, under the terms of the Empire Air Training Scheme, the United Kingdom Government undertook that pupils of Canada, Australia and New Zealand should, after training, be identified with their respective Dominions. To this end, Australians overseas serving with the R.A.A.F. were to continue to wear R.A.A.F. uniform and to be grouped into their own squadrons. In Burma, however, attempts at "dominionisation" had broken down in the face of practical difficulties and operational needs.

In May 1943 the 332 Australian aircrew serving with the R.A.F. in the India-Burma theatre were scattered among a total of 42 R.A.F. squadrons, only nine of which had more than ten Australians. They were:

| | Location | Australian aircrew members |
|---|---|---|
| No. 224 Group | | |
| No. 45 (Vengeance) Squadron | Chittagong | 26 |
| No. 11 (Blenheim) Squadron | Feni | 44 |
| No. 60 (Blenheim) Squadron | Chittagong | 21 |
| No. 113 (Bisley) Squadron | Feni | 16 |
| No. 221 Group | | |
| No. 99 (Wellington) Squadron | Jessore | 11 |
| No. 215 (Wellington) Squadron | Jessore | 27 |
| Other formations | | |
| No. 84 (Vengeance) Squadron | Ceylon | 13 |
| No. 36 (Wellington) Squadron | | 18 |
| No. 31 (Transport) Squadron | | 12 |
| | Total | 188 |

The remaining 144 aircrew members served in another 32 squadrons. Of these, fifty were pilots in Hurricane squadrons serving in India or Ceylon, and the remainder operated Spitfire, Blenheim, Mohawk, Beaufort, Lysander, Vengeance, Beaufighter, Hudson, Catalina, Liberator or transport aircraft, from various parts of India and Ceylon.

In May 1943 Pape took up with the R.A.F. the question of grouping the Australians; his approach followed announcements by the Australian Minister for Air, Mr Drakeford, to the effect that the Air Ministry had agreed, subject to operational exigencies, to concentrate Australians in complete aircrews and squadrons. Pape represented to the R.A.F. that such concentrations would considerably simplify Australian administrative problems, and the R.A.F. undertook to do its best to apply the policy.

Pape found on setting up his liaison office that questions of promotion, tour of duty and lack of employment were the main worries of Australians in India. Some promotions made as early as September 1941 had not been notified to the aircrew concerned until May 1943. Pape worked on the problem immediately and within a few months most promotions had been brought up to date.

On the question of the length of a tour of duty Pape reported:

The point of view of nearly all aircrew seems to be that they want to know something. Even if four years were fixed, they would have something definite. . . . The continued absence of any expression of policy on this matter is creating difficulties for the staff and increases the causes of discontent among Australian personnel. Every Australian in the R.A.F. one encounters asks about this matter—some are not very worried about it—others are concerned even to the extent of being unreasonable. They have been told now for some months that the matter was being discussed in London. No word has arrived.

Another cause of discontent was that aircrews were not fully employed and many of them thought they were wasting their time. Pape found that there was in fact a good deal of lack of employment in India and with the coming of the monsoon even less flying would be done. A very large number of men averaged about ten to fourteen flying hours a month.

The experience of Pilot Officer Anderson,[6] who arrived in India in April 1943 from the United Kingdom in a Wellington bomber is an example. Anderson did his flying training in Australia and then an operational training course in England. He trained on Wellington X's and had 200 hours' flying on this type of aircraft. He had done a beam-approach course, an air-fighting course, and the normal operational training. He had been assessed "flying ability almost exceptional and an extremely good captain of aircraft". Before leaving England he had twelve hours' operational flying. He was selected as captain of a Pathfinder crew, but this posting fell through and he was posted to India. After a short course at a Ferry Training Flight, he flew a Wellington X out to India. He was then posted to No. 99 Squadron, which was operating Wellington aircraft from Jessore. On arrival at Jessore, Anderson was told that he would get no flying for six months because the crews of this squadron were being converted to Wellington X aircraft, and, with the approach of the monsoons, there would be nothing for new pilots to do. In any event, this squadron had a number of surplus crews. Ten days later, he was posted to the Main Ferry Pool, Mauripur (near Karachi). On arrival there, the commanding officer told Anderson he thought the posting was a mistake, as he had more crews than he could use.

Anderson learnt that there was nothing for him to do and perhaps never would be as he (Anderson) was trained for heavy aircraft and all heavy aircraft arrived with their own crews.

Anderson had now been in India for seven weeks and apart from a few unofficial flights in Harvards and a volunteer flight in which he flew an unserviceable Wellington to Lahore, had done no flying. His crew were doing ground jobs around the station. Inquiries showed that there was a considerable surplus of crews in the three Wellington squadrons in India and there was little prospect of the others getting much flying. Anderson was keen to get into operations and felt that if he continued to do nothing, his efficiency would suffer and he would probably need another operational training course. He did not obtain a posting to an operational squadron until after he was transferred to Middle East Command in July.

[6] F-Lt J. W. Anderson, DFC, 405990. 36 and 142 Sqns RAF. Contractor; of Rockhampton, Qld; b. Warrnambool, Vic, 12 Dec 1912.

Another member of a Wellington crew, Sergeant Martin,[7] an air gunner, arrived in India on 14th August 1943. He was not posted to a unit until January 1944 and then he was misemployed since he was posted to a ferry unit which had no use for air gunners. He spent dreary months of waiting at an air transport pool at Poona along with many other Australians in a similar position. They did guard duty, physical training parades and attended a few lectures. At one stage they were all overjoyed when informed that they were to be posted back to England, but three days later they learned that this would not happen.

At times the discontent arising from the frustration of such men showed itself in incidents involving military policemen and bad feeling developed between the Australians and the military police at Poona. In December 1943 Pape reported:

> The problem created by "pools" is still with us. Unfortunately, some of the N.C.O's at Poona are getting a little out of hand, and their discipline has been far from good. There seems to be five or six ringleaders who are having a bad effect on all the men there. Most of them have been away from home for some time, and have had little operational experience . . . the riot act was read to them in a fairly large way by F-Lt Levy[8] and F-Lt Armitage[9] when they were there recently but from what I have heard since it has had little effect. . . . Men who have been overseas for three years and who have never yet had a shot at the enemy feel that they are about due to go home anyhow, but feel ashamed to go back and say they have done no operational flying.

Nevertheless, the health, outlook and psychological frame of mind of the Australians as a whole remained sound. There were a few who were thoroughly discontented and wanted to get away from India, but in general spirits remained high.

Air Chief Marshal Peirse's policy for the employment of his squadrons during the monsoon had been laid down at the beginning of April 1943, as follows:

> To maintain a forward fighter offensive policy.
> To ensure the continuance of local air superiority.
> To protect coastal shipping southwards from Chittagong.
> To attack enemy occupied airfields wherever possible.
> To attack enemy lines of communications and shipping in the enemy forward areas.

In June 1943 heavy and medium-bomber operations were much handicapped by bad weather and shortage of spares. Nevertheless, a high percentage of successful sorties were undertaken during breaks in the weather.

In July, also, the monsoon conditions limited air operations in Burma, but the air assault was maintained at maximum effort whenever the weather allowed. On 1st July, for example, Stumm led a flight of Blen-

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[7] F-O E. W. P. Martin, 418507. 99 Sqn RAF, and 22 Ferry Control Unit RAF. Motor trimmer; of Chelsea, Vic; b. Mordialloc, Vic, 4 Nov 1922.

[8] Sqn Ldr D. A. Levy, 262015. (WWI: 3 Bn AIF and Irish Guards.) RAAF Liaison Officer, SEAC. Insurance broker; of Woollahra, NSW; b. West Maitland, NSW, 5 Nov 1895.

[9] Sqn Ldr J. A. M. Armitage, MBE, 262646. 11 Sqn; RAAF LO SEAC. Industrial adviser; of Mosman, NSW; b. Sydney, 5 Dec 1901.

heims from No. 11 Squadron through a rainstorm to attack the enemy lines of communication. On the same day eight Vengeances from No. 45 Squadron attacked storage buildings at the north end of Akyab Island. Fourteen bursts were seen on buildings in the target area. The Vengeances were escorted by Hurricanes of No. 261 Squadron. Two hours later on the same day another six Vengeances from this squadron attacked Akyab again.

Unlike the air forces in the South-West Pacific Area, the R.A.F. in Burma had found the Vultee Vengeance to be a successful weapon and they used it as the chief dive bomber. So successful was the aircraft and so pressing the need, that Vengeance pilots were put straight onto operations, without undergoing the usual conversion courses.

On 9th July Squadron Leader Proudfoot[1] set off to lead six Blenheims of No. 11 Squadron on an attack on the Taungup road, but after forty minutes in the air he had to return to base with runaway guns.[2] The remainder, including six Australians, continued and attacked the target in heavy rain and much cloud. One bomb was seen to hit a hillside above a road and two scored direct hits. After the bombing, the Blenheims strafed motor transport. Flight Sergeant Regan[3] was lost during this attack; his aircraft caught fire, the mainplane broke off, and the aircraft crashed into a hillside, exploding on impact, leaving the crew with no chance of survival.

No. 11 Squadron flew an obsolescent aircraft, but the spirit of its men was high.

> So old were these aircraft now, and so excellent the squadron spirit, that it was said the Blenheims flew on happiness alone. The ground crews were devoted to their aircraft, sometimes working for forty-eight hours, with hardly a pause, to repair a Blenheim in time for an operation, and then seeing it take off, circuit and return with the same old trouble. Blenheim spares were still unobtainable, and only by the ground crews' knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of each engine were they made to go at all. "It'll clear in the air" began as a hopeful catch-phrase and ended as a squadron battle-cry. Within the squadron the Australian and British personnel teamed up into "Pig Islanders" and "Pommie Bastards", and by these affectionate names they were known. As so often, when conditions were at their worst the contentment was greatest; the comradeship of the Blenheim crews became famous enough in India for men to try to get themselves posted to the Blenheims, despite the maturity of the aircraft.[4]

Beaufighters from No. 27 Squadron scored successes against transport on the 18th July. Flying Officer Innes,[5] and another pilot, attacked a

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[1] Sqn Ldr S. G. Proudfoot, 403006; 11 Sqn RAF. School teacher; of Grevillia, NSW; b. Gunnedah, NSW, 5 Jan 1915. Killed in aircraft accident 13 Sep 1943.

[2] Except in turrets and other manually-operated positions, the guns in an aircraft are fired by an electric or electro-hydraulic system, remotely controlled by the pilot. Should a fault occur (such as a short circuit) the guns fire in a long burst until they seize up through overheating of the mechanism.

[3] F-Sgt G. F. Regan, 409448; 11 Sqn RAF. Accountant; of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Elsternwick, 6 Jun 1915. Killed in action 9 Jul 1943.

[4] Air Ministry, *Wings of the Phoenix* (1949), p. 34.

[5] F-Lt D. J. S. Innes, 403929. 27, 22 and 92 Sqns RAF. Accountant; of Auburn, NSW; b. Edinburgh, Scotland, 18 Jan 1918.

locomotive and twelve closed trucks, scoring hits. Five goods engines were also attacked with cannon and machine-gun fire, strikes being seen on each. Later in the day, Flight Sergeant Trigwell[6] in a Beaufighter attacked ten closed trucks and eleven closed waggons all of which were sprayed with cannon fire and machine-gun bullets.

Liberators of No. 159 Squadron raided vital railway and river objectives at Sagaing on two occasions and also the railway yards and reversing centre at Sedaw. On the night of the 21st July nine Wellingtons from No. 99 Squadron and seven from No. 215 set out for Taungup.[7]

Five aircraft from No. 215 reached the target and bombed accurately, but two developed mechanical trouble and returned with their bombs. Favourable weather the following night enabled seven Wellingtons from No. 215 Squadron and five from No. 99 to repeat their raid on Taungup. Five of the Wellingtons reached the target and bombed it, one bombed Akyab and one returned with its bombs.

On the last day of July No. 11 Squadron carried out its final raid as a Blenheim squadron. Twelve aircraft with 25 Australians out of a total crew strength of 36, and led by Stumm, bombed Myingyan railway station. Bursts were observed in the marshalling yards, in the station area, and the centre of the town. This squadron was to re-equip with "Hurri-bombers", which meant that most of the Australian aircrews would be leaving the squadron. Hurricanes were becoming available in much greater numbers (the Hurricane strength in Burma-India rose from 677 in June 1943 to 1,088 in November 1943) and a number of squadrons in addition to No. 11 were being re-equipped with them. Five squadrons all told (Nos. 11, 34, 42, 60 and 113) on all of which Australians served were converted.

On 2nd August Squadron Leader Cotton[8] led three other pilots from No. 17 Squadron on an offensive sweep along the Chindwin and Myittha Rivers, sinking ten sampans and severely damaging six others. Next day, Sergeant Caldwell[9] in a Hurricane and four other Hurricanes from No. 258 Squadron, operating from Comilla, attacked and hit two large boats and twenty sampans on the Irrawaddy River.

The campaign against enemy watercraft assumed great importance in August, because the enemy, when rain made roads and tracks unserviceable, was forced to rely more and more on water transport. Beaufighter aircraft in particular were sent out on rover sweeps against river craft and also railway targets. In early August they attacked two locomotives and forty rolling stock, setting a number on fire.

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[6] F-O E. W. M. Trigwell, 415198; 27 Sqn RAF. Labourer; of Manjimup, WA; b. Donnybrook, WA, 23 Jun 1915.

[7] Australians in the Wellingtons of No. 215 included: P-O's L. H. Brooks (of Oakleigh, Vic), S. A. Dobson (Moonah, Tas), W-O W. G. Whitehead (Ipswich, Qld), F-Sgts R. V. Lantzke (Sydney), R. O. Devine (Clayfield, Qld), W. E. Skett (Subiaco, WA) and Sgts W. A. Leigh (Hampton, Vic), G. C. Stoner (Grafton, NSW), M. C. Lardner (East Kempsey, NSW), and R. W. Tait (Wellington, NSW).

[8] Sqn Ldr M. C. C. Cotton, DFC, 407041. 43 Sqn, 165 and 293 Wings RAF; comd 17 Sqn 1942-43. Irrigation officer; of Broken Hill, NSW; b. Broken Hill, 27 Mar 1917.

[9] F-O D. N. Caldwell, 401063. 129, 258 and 79 Sqns RAF. Bank clerk; of Melbourne; b. Suva, Fiji, 13 Apr 1922.

Flying Officer Innes, with an R.A.F. navigator, carried out a successful Beaufighter sortie on 20th August. East of Thazi he attacked a truck and scored hits. Two miles farther east he attacked another lorry, scoring hits and setting it on fire. Two men, who appeared to be natives, staggered from the driver's cab. He then saw two locomotives on the near-by main line. One engine was camouflaged and the other appeared to be taking in water. Innes made six attempts to attack them but, in consequence of the unfavourable nature of the country, these attacks could not be pressed home. A large water tank, thirty feet above ground, was next attacked and water was pouring from it when the Beaufighter turned for base.

In September 1943 the monsoon abated but there was still little activity on the ground. By cooperating with ground troops reconnaissance aircraft were able to locate enemy troop concentrations which provided targets for the Vengeance dive bombers. On the 16th September six Vengeances of No. 82 Squadron, led by Flying Officer Sandilands,[1] attacked the court house and adjacent buildings at Buthidaung, scoring two direct hits and two near misses on the court house and direct hits on other buildings. Sandilands led two more flights of Vengeances in attacks on the 19th and 20th September. During September No. 177 Beaufighter Squadron destroyed a number of steamers and motor launches, 16 large barges, and scored hits on 100 native craft, as well as on 19 motor transport and 15 locomotives. In addition, this squadron, together with No. 27 (Beaufighter) Squadron, had destroyed a 200-foot paddle-steamer, seriously damaged the *Assam,* said to be the largest paddle-steamer in the world and badly damaged the *Shwelan.*

On the 22nd September Pilot Officer Cohen[2], captain of a Liberator of No. 160 Squadron, based at Ceylon, and his crew took off for a photographic reconnaissance of the Nicobar Islands, but failed to return. The Liberator was shot down after a fight with Japanese navy fighter aircraft over Car Nicobar. Cohen was a particularly fine pilot and had been chosen in August 1943 to fly Sir Richard Peirse to the Quebec conference.

In October 1943 the monsoon ended and both sides now increased their activities both on land and in the air. Patrol clashes resulting from the probing of forward positions came more frequently. No. 221 Group began a sustained night-bombing effort against strategic targets. From the 1st October to the 15th November a total of 63 Liberator and 234 Wellington bomber sorties were flown on targets ranging from Kalewa to Rangoon and from Akyab to Heho, striking at enemy airfields, port facilities, stores dumps, railway centres and enemy encampments. From these operations only one Liberator was lost over Rangoon and one Wellington, which crashed at base on taking off, killing all the crew.

[1] F-Lt J. W. Sandilands, DFC, 402405; 82 Sqn RAF. Station overseer; of Uralla, NSW; b. Uralla, 12 Jun 1912. Killed in aircraft accident 13 Apr 1944.

[2] P-O J. Cohen, 401104. 48, 86 and 160 Sqns RAF. Handbag manufacturer; of East Melbourne; b. Tel Aviv, Israel, 5 Feb 1922. Killed in action 22 Sep 1943.

In the middle of October two Vultee Vengeance squadrons—Nos. 45 and 110—moved to Kumbhirgram in eastern Assam where they came under the operational control of No. 170 Wing. Operating from Kumbhirgram on the 16th October, six Vengeances of No. 45 dive-bombed stores and the Japanese headquarters at Kalemyo. Seven bursts were seen on the target area.

With the continued improvement in the weather, R.A.F. bombing operations continued to increase. Vengeance dive bombers made some sixty sorties in the week ending 21st October. Six from No. 45 Squadron, with eight Australians in the crews, dive-bombed stores and possible troop concentrations at Mawlaik on the 18th October. Nine bombs fell in the target area, and when the aircraft left, the target was covered by a pall of smoke, dust and debris.

On 20th October greatly increased activity by enemy reconnaissance aircraft culminated in a series of attacks, with the main effort against Chittagong. This was the first major operation of the Japanese Army Air Force for nearly five months. The Japanese dropped bombs from 20,000 feet on Chittagong, most of the load falling in the water, but some fell on land near the main jetty killing thirty people.

Twenty-one Hurricanes, including nine from No. 261 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant McDonald[3] and eight from No. 146 Squadron scrambled and made contact. Three enemy bombers and one fighter were destroyed (one of these being claimed by McDonald) and four were damaged. Three Hurricanes were lost, one of the pilots being saved. Beaufighters continued to harass the enemy's river, rail and road communications. Of the five large paddle-steamers on the Irrawaddy and main rivers in Burma, four were destroyed during October.

During the whole period from June to November 1943 Allied air superiority in India-Burma was seldom challenged. The R.A.F. alone mounted 10,547 sorties of all types, dropping a total of 1,324 tons of bombs. The destruction of enemy lines of supply and communication had been the primary task of all bombers both British and American, and although their efforts had succeeded in reducing the volume of supplies, goods and equipment still flowed into northern Burma.

For the loss of 31 aircraft, the R.A.F's Bengal Command claimed the following results:

| | |
|---|---|
| Sampans destroyed | 160 |
| Sampans damaged | 2,624 |
| Power-driven watercraft and barges destroyed | 12 |
| Power-driven watercraft and barges damaged | 193 |
| Locomotives destroyed | 9 |
| Locomotives damaged | 143 |
| Rolling stock destroyed | 27 |
| Rolling stock damaged | 464 |
| Motor vehicles destroyed | 42 |
| Motor vehicles damaged | 142 |

[3] Sqn Ldr D. K. McDonald, DSO, DFC, 402748. 130, 30, 136 and 261 Sqns RAF; comd 134 Sqn RAF, 1944-45. Automotive technician; of Greenwich, NSW; b. Roma, Qld, 31 Dec 1916.

The main strategic target throughout the period was the port of Rangoon, key to the internal transport system of Burma. It had been attacked regularly by both the R.A.F. and the Tenth Air Force bombers, but the monsoon had reduced operations against it. The American bombers made Rangoon their principal target. As well as bombing the port, Liberators began in February 1943 to lay mines in the dock approaches, and this had the effect of helping to reduce the number of ships docking. The Japanese, fully aware of the importance of Rangoon, continued to defend it tenaciously and as the monsoon season drew to a close Allied bombers met stronger and stronger opposition in the air.

In August 1943, at the Quebec conference, Mr Churchill, President Roosevelt and their staffs, had agreed to yet another change of operational command in the Burma-India theatre. They had appointed Rear-Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten,[4] formerly chief of Combined Operations, as Supreme Allied Commander in South-East Asia. General Auchinleck remained as Commander-in-Chief in India.

The Allies considered that keeping China actively in the war was the most useful contribution that could be made by Mountbatten at this time, and his orders were to secure the Burma-China road and to safeguard the "Hump" air route to China. To enable China to continue the struggle against Japan, an eventual monthly airlift target of 20,000 tons was set for the air ferry to China.

Mountbatten's appointment, which operated from 16th November 1943, noticeably infused a more enthusiastic spirit in the command. Within a few days of his arrival he flew to China and established cordial relations with Chiang Kai-shek. With Stilwell, he then drafted plans to be submitted to Roosevelt and Churchill at the Cairo conference. In order to persuade Chiang Kai-shek to commit his Yunnan force for the campaign in north Burma it was necessary that Mountbatten should have sufficient naval means available to mount an amphibious landing in southern Burma, and Churchill had given Mountbatten an assurance that these means would be available. The Mountbatten-Stilwell plans also provided for extensive operations by Wingate's long-range penetration groups behind the Japanese lines. At Cairo, Churchill and Roosevelt received these plans favourably, and Chiang Kai-shek, who was present, was told that the naval means necessary for the amphibious operation in Burma would be made available.

With the likelihood of obtaining these naval allocations and the cooperation of Chiang Kai-shek's Yunnan force, Mountbatten felt he had the basic needs for a major success in Burma in 1944. Within a few weeks, however, high-level decisions at Teheran completely changed the picture. The landing craft which had been allotted to Mountbatten for his operations

[4] Admiral Rt Hon Earl Mountbatten, KG, GCSI, GCIE, GCVO, KCB, DSO; RN. (1914-18: HMS's *Lion, Queen Elizabeth* and submarines.) Comd HMS *Kelly* and 5th Destroyer Flotilla 1939-41, HMS *Illustrious* 1941; Chief of Combined Ops 1942-43; Supreme Allied Cdr, SE Asia 1943-46; Viceroy of India 1947, Governor-General 1947-48; First Sea Lord since 1955. B. Frogmore House, Windsor, England, 25 Jun 1900.

in Burma were re-allotted to the European theatre.[5] Roosevelt informed Chiang Kai-shek by radio on 6th December that large-scale amphibious operations in Burma would have to be shelved, whereupon Chiang considered himself released from his undertaking to mount an offensive with his Yunnan force. The switch in the allotment of amphibious means from Burma back to Europe arose out of Russia's promise at Teheran to join the war against Japan after the defeat of Germany, provided that British and American resources were concentrated first against Germany.

Mountbatten now proposed that an attack should be mounted on Sumatra and Singapore after the defeat of Germany. This proposal brought him into conflict with Stilwell who preferred an advance across Burma. Stilwell's view prevailed and the Combined Chiefs of Staff recommended that Mountbatten be directed to undertake an offensive in upper Burma during the current dry season.

Meanwhile, on 31st October Stilwell had already launched an offensive aimed at seizing the Mogaung-Myitkyina area. The 22nd and 38th Chinese Divisions were now heavily engaged in combat with elements of the *18th Japanese Division*; but the offensive was on only a small scale.

After Admiral Mountbatten took over command, General Sir George Giffard[6] was appointed commander-in-chief of the British land forces (he did not control the American or Chinese troops in Burma) and Lieut-General Slim[7] was chosen as commander of the newly-created Fourteenth Army. General Stilwell had been appointed Deputy Supreme Allied Commander under Mountbatten, and in addition held the appointments of Chief of Staff to Chiang Kai-shek, of Commanding General of the American ground forces in the China-Burma-India theatre, and of commander of the Chinese and American troops in the Northern Combat Area Command (as the northern front was known). Stilwell now held so many appointments that at times he was able to solve problems by issuing orders to himself!

Mountbatten also introduced changes in the control of air formations. With effect from 16th November 1943, he appointed Air Chief Marshal Peirse as Allied Air Commander-in-Chief. Peirse assumed operational control of all air forces in the South-East Asia theatre with authority to employ them in conformity with the policy of the Supreme Commander.

These forces comprised what had constituted the R.A.F. India Command and those American units in the theatre which made up the Tenth Air Force. It was Peirse's task to ensure that these forces operated as a coherent body and that best use was made of the potentialities of each. To ensure the integrated operational control of units in Bengal and Assam,

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[5] These landing craft were used at Anzio in Italy.

[6] General Sir George Giffard, GCB, DSO. (1914-18: Lt-Col, East Africa.) GOC Brit Forces Palestine 1940; GOC West Africa 1940-41; GOC-in-C Eastern Army, India, 1942; C-in-C 11th Army Group in SE Asia 1943-44. Regular soldier; b. 27 Sep 1886.

[7] Field Marshal Sir William Slim, GCB, GCMG, GCVO, GBE, DSO, MC. Comd 10 Ind Inf Bde 1939-41; GOC 10 Ind Div 1941-42; comd XV Indian Corps 1942-43, Fourteenth Army 1943-45; C-in-C Allied Land Forces SE Asia 1945-46; Chief of the Imp Gen Staff 1948-52. Governor-General of Australia 1953-60. Regular soldier; of Bristol, Eng; b. 6 Aug 1891.

a new headquarters was set up under Major-General George E. Stratemeyer, U.S.A.A.F. It was named Eastern Air Command and was located initially at Delhi. This formation headquarters, which had previously existed under the title "Headquarters, U.S.A.A.F. India-Burma sector", had provided base facilities for the Fourteenth Air Force as well as administering and controlling the Tenth. The new headquarters consisted basically of the operations section of the old organisation with the addition of a Royal Air Force element. This command included all R.A.F. operational units which had formerly come under Bengal Command and all those comprising the Tenth in the same area. These forces were subdivided into the Third Tactical Air Force under Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin[8] and a Strategic Air Force under Brigadier-General Howard C. Davidson of the U.S.A.A.F.

Peirse was authorised to effect such regrouping of his operational units necessary to achieve maximum efficiency and he therefore merged British and American transport units into an organisation which was given the title Troop Carrier Command. Similarly British and American photographic reconnaissance units were brought together in one command which assumed the title of Photographic Reconnaissance Force.

In November 1943 there were 795 Australians in India of whom 528 were serving on squadrons; by March 1944 the figure was 931. Most of the squadrons on which Australians served were assigned to the Third Tactical Air Force, which now succeeded the old Bengal Command. Of those not serving on squadrons, 79 were in the Air Transit Pool at Poona, 43 were at Main Ferry Crew Pool, and the remaining 150 at headquarters, operational training units and other schools.

No progress had been made towards "dominionisation" of the Australians. The 528 serving on squadrons were now scattered through 58 squadrons and there were many units on which only one, two or three Australians were serving. This wide dispersal made it difficult for the Air Liaison Office to keep in touch with them. In March 1944 Pape had been asked to nominate two squadrons in which Australians could be concentrated. He selected No. 136 (Spitfires) and No. 615 (Hurricanes). The commanding officer of the former was Squadron Leader Constantine,[9] an Australian in the R.A.F., and of the latter Squadron Leader McCormack[1] of the R.A.A.F. Pape toured squadrons in November and found that with few exceptions the men were in good spirits. With the passing of the monsoon most of them were getting much flying and he found that the squadrons with the fewest grouches and the most philosophical outlook were those which were regularly in operations.

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[8] Air Marshal Sir John Baldwin, KBE, CB, DSO. AOC 3 Gp Bomber Cd 1939-42; Dep AOC-in-C India 1942-43; comd 3 TAF 1943-44. B. 13 Apr 1892.

[9] W Cdr A. N. Constantine, 40893 RAF. 87 Sqn RAF; comd 136 Sqn RAF 1943-44. Regular air force offr; b. Moama, NSW, 13 Dec 1914. Killed in aircraft accident 29 Jul 1947.

[1] Sqn Ldr D. W. McCormack, DFC, 400232. Comd 615 Sqn RAF 1944. Electrical mechanic of Seddon, Vic; b. Seddon, 27 Nov 1917. Killed in aircraft accident 10 Aug 1944.

By November, Air Chief Marshal Peirse had a total of 48 British Commonwealth and 17 American squadrons deployed for operations. These tactical air units provided defence and support over the three main areas of land operations: in the Arakan, along the line from Tiddim to Hamalin, and in the Ledo sector in northern Burma. They were under the control of No. 224 Group, No. 221 Group and the U.S.A.A.F's Northern Air Sector Force respectively. The squadrons engaged in strategic bombing continued to be based farther west since the marshy areas of the Sundarbans and the poor lines of communication in that area made the construction of heavy-bomber airfields east of the Brahmaputra most difficult.

Opposed to this Allied air force was an enemy air force of about 250 aircraft disposed in the airfields around Heho, Anisakan, Rangoon and Chiengmai. Compared with this, Stratemeyer's Eastern Air Command had a total of 819 aircraft, of which 576 were fighters, 70 medium bombers, 79 heavy bombers, 10 reconnaissance aircraft and 84 transports. About 100 of the Allied fighters were held back from operations to defend air installations in Assam and along the Hump route. Nevertheless some 400 British-American fighters were available against an estimated 100 Japanese so that the Allies had an overwhelming advantage. This advantage was enhanced by an ample air warning system and by better communications.

Mountbatten set the following tasks for his air command:

(*a*) Conduct a strategic air offensive in conformity with the general plan to destroy enemy air forces and installations, selected road, rail, and river communications, and depots and maintenance facilities;
(*b*) Ensure the defence of the U.S. Air Transport Command airfields in northeast India and to provide for the defence against air attacks of Calcutta and adjacent industrial areas;
(*c*) Provide support for the operations of the Fourteenth Army;
(*d*) Provide support for the Chinese-American forces under command of General Stilwell which were operating from bases in the Ledo area;
(*e*) Support the operations of the Long Range Penetration Forces; and
(*f*) Conduct photographic reconnaissance and survey.

Peirse planned to employ the strategic bomber force against targets in the following order of priority: enemy occupied airfields and installations, shipping, railways, oil installations in Burma and suitable objectives in Bangkok. However, the course the battle was to take would make adjustments necessary, and a considerable proportion of the total bomber effort was directed to tactical targets in support of the army, and later to carry supplies to the beleaguered garrison at Imphal after the Japanese attack.

In November General Stratemeyer proposed to Air Chief Marshal Peirse that American and British bomber forces should collaborate in a series of heavy attacks on the principal strategic area in Burma-Rangoon. Peirse readily agreed to the proposal. Stratemeyer planned to use the American bombers, escorted by fighters, on daylight raids and the British Liberators and Wellingtons were to attack at night. To achieve the maxi-



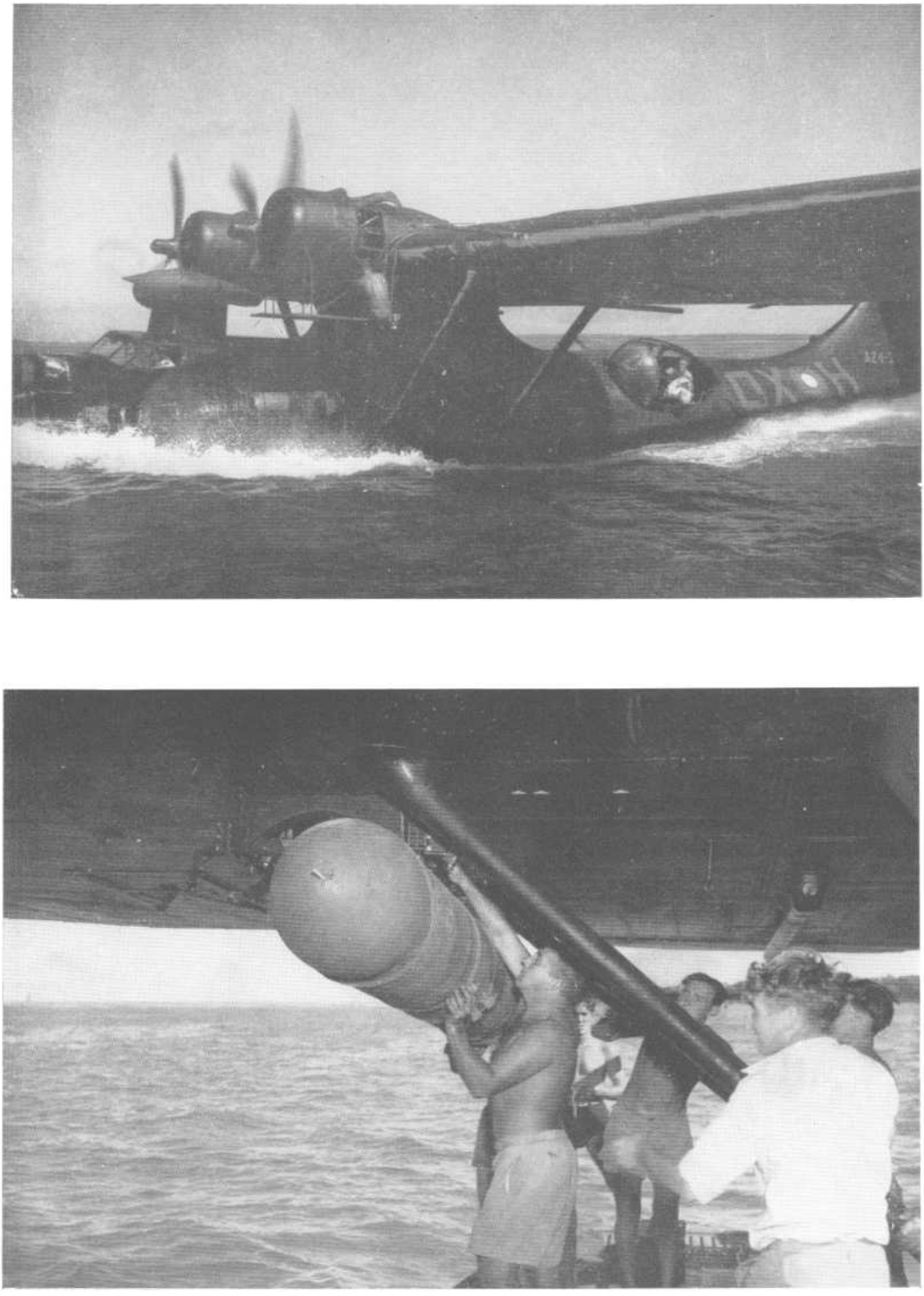
*(R.A.A.F.)*

During the period September 1944 to May 1945, Beauforts and Boomerangs of No. 71 Wing flew hundreds of sorties each month in the Aitape-Wewak area, many of which were in direct support of the ground operations of the 6th Division. Here Beauforts are bombing beach positions in the Wewak area in early 1945. To the left Japanese can be seen running along the beach.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Dagua airfield, near Wewak, after it had been captured by the Australians on 21st March 1945. In the foreground is a Lily bomber and behind it are others of the 102 destroyed aircraft which were dotted about.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Preparing a Catalina of No. 43 Squadron for a minelaying operation at Darwin on 28th May 1945. Upper: The pilot taxis round the harbour while fitters check the engines. Lower: F-Sgt J. W. N. Stretton adjusting one of the mines on its rack.

mum concentration possible Stratemeyer asked Chennault to make available his No. 308 Bombardment Group for the operation and Chennault agreed. The three principal targets to be attacked at Rangoon were the locomotive works, the marshalling yards and the docks area. D-day for the operation was 25th November and it was expected that the whole operation would last six days and five nights.

On the first day (25th November) the weather was bad. However, the Americans carried on with the operation. Fighter escorts failed to make contact with the bombers and Rangoon was entirely covered over by cloud with the result that all bomber strikes except one were unsuccessful. On the 26th November the weather forced the abandonment of all missions, but on the following day the Americans struck with some success at the locomotive works.

In spite of the weather, the Wellingtons of No. 215 Squadron hit the marshalling yards on the night of 26th-27th November, thirteen aircraft taking part. They scored hits and experienced light anti-aircraft fire over the target. On the return journey one of the Wellingtons crashed two miles from base, killing the captain and bomb aimer; two Australians in the crew, Warrant Officer Stevens[2] and Sergeant Pritchard[3], escaped with slight injuries.

On the night of 27th-28th November seven Liberators of No. 159 Squadron struck at the Rangoon docks with fair success. On the nights of the 28th to the 30th November and 1st December, No. 215 bombed Rangoon again. Results were difficult to observe because of the cloud. More missions were flown by the R.A.F. heavies on the 2nd, 5th and 7th December against Bassein, Heho airfield and Moulmein. Altogether they flew sixty-six sorties losing three Wellingtons. Meanwhile, the Americans, operating during the day, had met with considerable fighter opposition and lost twelve Liberators and ten fighters. Because of the weather the objectives of the operation were not fully realised although there was considerable damage at the locomotive works and docks.

The Wellingtons continued to attack enemy lines of communication through December. They concentrated mainly on railway centres while American Mitchells directed their operations against bridges. There were a large number of strategically important bridges in Burma and many were put out of action during attacks by the Mitchells and Liberators of the Tenth Air Force.

General Stratemeyer, after his moderate success against Rangoon, now turned his attention to Bangkok in Siam, which had become strategically important since the completion of the Siam-Burma railway on which many prisoners of war had been forced to work. American and British Liberators bombed it on the night of 19th December. Five Liberators from No. 150 Squadron and five from No. 355 Squadron were detailed to bomb the

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[2] P-O J. W. Stevens, 411567. 99, 215 Sqns RAF, and 100 Sqn. Asst manager; of Sydney; b. East Ham, London, Eng, 30 Mar 1911.

[3] F-O J. E. Pritchard, 412835. 215 Sqn RAF, and 99 Sqn. Railway employee; of Grafton, NSW; b. Grafton, 2 Aug 1915.

Bansue marshalling yards as the main target. Flight Sergeant Ford,[4] captain of one of the Liberators, reported that the lights of Bangkok were visible for many miles when flying to the target but the area was blacked out by the time they arrived. Searchlights were active during the raid and the Liberators experienced heavy anti-aircraft fire which, however, was ineffective. The Liberators attacked successfully causing large fires in the marshalling yards area. Flight Lieutenant Morphett[5] (who had three other Australians in his crew) dropped bombs in the centre of the main lines.

On the 23rd December the American and British Liberators attacked Bangkok again. The R.A.F. sent nine aircraft, some of which had Australian crew members. The marshalling yards, terminus railway station and the military arsenal were targets and big fires were started by the bombers. On 30th December eight Liberators, three of which were captained by Australians, bombed the marshalling yards at Rangoon.

In November and December the R.A.F. gave support to the Fourteenth Army which was then occupied in regrouping for forthcoming operations. In IV Corps area, the enemy advanced into the Chin Hills.

Intense air operations were carried out in support of IV Corps operations in this area. Dive bombers from Nos. 45, 82 and 110 Squadrons took part, with Hurricanes of No. 155 Squadron and Wellingtons of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons, while fighter cover was provided by Nos. 134, 11 (now converted to Hurricanes), 258 and 60 Squadrons. Led by Flight Lieutenant Hartnell,[6] twelve Vengeances of No. 45 dive-bombed an enemy position near Fort White on the 13th. They returned later in the day but cloud cover prevented their attack in the jungle near Fort White and the attack was switched to some bunker positions in the area. On 20th December, in response to a call from the army, six Vengeances of No. 82 Squadron, led by Flying Officer Sandilands, attacked a Japanese headquarters in a village near Fort White, and on 24th December Australians in Nos. 45 and 110 Squadrons attacked the near-by bunkers. The positions were under fire from our own ground forces and the Vengeances bombed on targets indicated by shell bursts.

In December 1943 the Japanese Army Air Force mounted a series of offensive air operations against Calcutta and the Arakan sector. But the advent of Spitfire aircraft in Bengal, early in November, had begun an era of successful interceptions. The first two Spitfire squadrons, Nos. 607 and 615, were based at Chittagong in order to protect and cover that vital port and to cover the Arakan front. Within the month, the Spitfires had destroyed four enemy reconnaissance aircraft of the Dinah type which previously had come over the forward bases with impunity

[4] F-O B. E. C. Ford, 416754. 159, 355 and 32 Sqns RAF. Colourist and dyer; of Kensington Gardens, SA; b. Adelaide, 6 Jun 1919. Killed in aircraft accident 30 Aug 1945.

[5] Sqn Ldr J. E. Morphett, DFC, 407533. 60 and 159 Sqns RAF; comd 355 Sqn RAF 1943-44. School teacher; of Kingswood, SA; b. Norwood, SA, 25 Feb 1911.

[6] F-Lt G. W. Hartnell, 404097. 211 and 45 Sqns RAF. Grazier; of Dalby, Qld; b. Dalby, 21 Feb 1914.

because of the inability of the Hurricanes to equal them in height and speed.

Australian fighter pilots played a part in the activities of these squadrons. The first of the four Dinahs fell victim to Flying Officer Gannon,[7] who, on 16th November, intercepted it flying due north off the coast at 26,000 feet, fired a three-and-a-half seconds' burst, and watched it spin to the ground.

On 29th November the Spitfires of No. 615 Squadron intercepted a Japanese formation of twelve bombers escorted by at least nine fighters. The Spitfires claimed one bomber probably destroyed and four fighters damaged with no loss to the Spitfires. Gannon claimed one fighter damaged.

The enemy claimed a success when he attacked Calcutta on 5th December with sixty bombers and fighters, and avoided the Spitfires by flying out over the Bay of Bengal beyond their range. The Spitfires were scrambled but had to return before making contact. Three squadrons and a half of Hurricanes intercepted over Calcutta but they lost five destroyed and the enemy two.

On 26th December the Japanese, encouraged by this success, sent over another big raiding force. At 11.15 a.m. Flying Officer Andrews[8] and Flight Sergeant Chatfield[9] of No. 615 Squadron were scrambled from Dohazari airfield and were given directions to intercept one enemy aircraft. However, soon after they were airborne, the Japanese aircraft increased to at least six, then 20 and then to more than 50. Andrews and Chatfield, meanwhile, had been ordered to circle base and wait for the rest of the squadron to join them. While doing this they saw an enemy formation of 20 bombers with 50 fighters weaving and making large sweeps round the bombers. Andrews and Chatfield, although faced by more than 70 enemy aircraft, immediately gave battle and both made several skilful attacks on the enemy formation. Watchers on the ground saw three bombers and one fighter crash. Soon afterwards, Chatfield and Andrews landed. The rest of the squadron did not make contact.

An encounter with a Dinah by two Australian pilots of No. 152 Squadron marked the first occasion on which this squadron clashed with the enemy. With No. 81 (Spitfire) Squadron, this squadron arrived in India in November 1943, from Italy. No. 152 became operational at Baigachi on 19th December and seven days later had opened its score against the Japanese. Flying Officer MacDonald[1] and Flight Sergeant Patterson,[2] both Australians, were scrambled at 8.5 a.m. on 26th December and at 33,000 feet intercepted the Dinah a few miles south-east of their base. After a chase they shot it down in flames. An unusual feature of this encounter

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[7] F-Lt K. F. Gannon, 404563; 615 Sqn RAF. Police cadet; of Brisbane; b. Mareeba, Qld, 10 Feb 1920.

[8] F-Lt G. W. Andrews, 402932. 130 and 615 Sqns RAF, 79 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Hamilton, NSW; b. Coffs Harbour, NSW, 25 May 1924.

[9] F-O H. B. Chatfield, 401493. 460 Sqn, 5 and 615 Sqns RAF. Public servant; of Bendigo, Vic; b. Bendigo, 1 Jun 1920.

[1] F-Lt R. E. J. MacDonald, DFC, 411667. 118 and 152 Sqns RAF. Carpenter; of Bondi, NSW; b. Randwick, NSW, 22 Jun 1921.

[2] F-Lt R. O. Patterson, 409218; 152 Sqn RAF. Engineer; of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Elsternwick, 24 Nov 1921.

was a missile which was apparently fired from the tail of the Dinah. This missile exploded with a flak-like burst 100 yards in front of MacDonald's Spitfire, but did no damage apart from making a few small holes in the nose and wing.

On 31st December the Spitfires scored one of their greatest successes against the Japanese forays in the Arakan area. Fourteen Sallys, escorted by fifteen Oscars, which had been attacking light naval units returning from a bombardment of Ramree Island, were intercepted by twelve Spitfires of No. 136 Squadron. The Spitfires destroyed eight bombers and three fighters for the loss of one, the pilot of which was saved. In this engagement Flying Officer Garvan[3] was credited with having destroyed one Sally, probably another and with having damaged two Oscars. Garvan's aircraft was hit by the Oscars but returned safely to base.

The Japanese reacted to this reverse by sending more than thirty fighters to sweep the Chittagong area later in the day. When the enemy fighters were fifteen miles north-east of Chittagong, they split into pairs. The Spitfires intercepted three pairs and in the ensuing fights one Oscar was claimed as damaged. Further large-scale air combat between the Spitfires and Japanese formations took place on the 15th and 20th January. On 15th January Nos. 136 and 607 Squadrons destroyed six enemy aircraft. On 20th January further large-scale air combats took place in the Maungdaw area when a sweep by Oscars and Hamps was intercepted by Nos. 136 and 607 Squadrons about 9 a.m. Constantine of No. 136 made contact with some fifty enemy and led his squadron in an attack from out of the sun. A number of dog-fights followed in which the Spitfires were heavily outnumbered. No. 136 claimed five destroyed for the loss of one R.A.F. sergeant pilot who was killed. Constantine and Garvan, who was slightly wounded, both claimed one aircraft destroyed in this fight.

Air activity had increased considerably in January 1944, and throughout this month Australians in a total of fifteen squadrons of Third T.A.F. and Strategic Air Command took part in some eight separate missions. They flew these missions in a variety of aircraft including the Hurricanes of Nos. 20, 28, 134 and 261 Squadrons; the Beaufighters of Nos. 27 and 177 Squadrons; the Vengeances of Nos. 45 and 82 Squadrons; the Wellingtons of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons; the Spitfires of Nos. 136, 607 and 615 Squadrons and the Liberators of Nos. 159 and 355 Squadrons. Australian pilots of No. 20 Squadron were out on operations on nineteen days during January.

By February 1944 the Fourteenth British Army and the Japanese army, both strong, well-trained and equipped, were poised and ready to join battle in one of the crucial engagements of the war in Burma. The ambitious Japanese plan, in which they were to use 100,000 assault troops, was to invade India. The British objective was to begin thrusting

[3] F-Lt D. E. W. Garvan, DFC, 411770; 136 Sqn RAF. Jackeroo; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 16 Apr 1917.

the Japanese out of Burma. The first great test of strength came in the Arakan area. The British plan in this area was to clear the Mayu peninsula as far south as to command the mouth of the Naf River for sea supply and to secure the Maungdaw-Buthidaung road. General Slim had available for this purpose, the XV Indian Corps. The 5th Indian Division of this Corps was to capture Razabil and Maungdaw, while the 7th Indian Division was to occupy Buthidaung and cut in to the rear of Letwedet. An essential to this plan was a flank guard which would be provided by the 81st West African Division which would march down the Kaladan Valley, in order to divert forces towards it.

The Japanese plan was to invade India from Arakan. The *55th Japanese Division* was split into three task forces, one of which (*Tanahashi Force*) would attack the 7th Indian Division from the rear and the other two would also infiltrate and cut British lines of communication. The British would be surrounded and destroyed and the road to Chittagong laid open. They would then incite a general uprising in Bengal and the final phase would come when the Japanese would launch the main blow in the Manipur Valley, smashing the centre of the Allied front.

The Japanese plan also called for impressive air measures to support the ground troops. "The objectives of the Japanese Air Force," wrote Air Chief Marshal Peirse in his dispatch on the operation, "appear to have been firstly to intercept our aircraft engaged in close support, secondly to increase the morale of his own troops and thirdly, to give some measure of ground support by attacks on our positions and forward bases."

Anticipating the Arakan offensive by four days, the Japanese launched their attack on 4th February. From out of the mists at Taung Bazaar, which lay nine miles behind the British lines, a detachment of *Tanahashi Force* suddenly appeared and captured the village. *Kubo Force* meanwhile cut the lines of communication of the 5th Indian Division, blowing up bridges, setting fire to dumps and waylaying convoys. The 7th Indian Division was beleaguered in the "Admin Box", and the Japanese had some right to expect the British forces to attempt a retreat towards Chittagong. The Third Tactical Air Force, however, had enough fighter strength to handle the Japanese squadrons, and there were ample transport planes available to supply the surrounded garrison in the "Admin Box".

On 4th February, the day that *Tanahashi* struck, No. 136 Squadron was scrambled to intercept an enemy fighter force of over forty aircraft reported over Bawli Bazaar. The Spitfires carried out a sweep of Buthidaung, Rathedaung and Maungdaw at 30,000 feet, sighting more than twenty enemy fighters over Buthidaung. Two sections went down to attack and were in turn attacked by enemy aircraft above them.

Warrant Officer Cousens,[4] an Australian, and another pilot became separated from the rest in the violent evasive action. Cousens, however, probably destroyed one Oscar in the engagement.

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[4] F-Lt W. L. Cousens, 412911. 5 and 136 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Tamworth, NSW; b. Tamworth, 22 May 1922.

The reaction of Third T.A.F. to the increased enemy air activity over the Arakan was to increase the number of escort sorties flown and to institute standing patrols over the battle area. Thus, on 8th February, when air transports began dropping supplies to the beleaguered 7th Indian Division, Hurricanes of No. 134 Squadron escorted them to the scene. Several fights took place and three of the Oscars were claimed as damaged and one probably destroyed. One pilot who was jumped by an Oscar, crash-landed in the mud at the mouth of a creek. The Oscar followed him to strafe but could not pull out in time and crashed.

A number of Australians took part in the air supply operations, beginning on the 8th February, which played such a vital part in this second battle of the Arakan. Nearly every crew in No. 62 Squadron included at least one Australian. Others served on Nos. 31, 94, and 117 Squadrons. On 9th February 12 Spitfires of No. 615 were sent up to intercept 50 enemy aircraft reported over Maungdaw-Buthidaung-Cox's Bazaar. Three of the Spitfires were hit in the fight which followed while the Spitfires claimed one Hamp destroyed and five damaged. Later that morning McCormack led twelve aircraft, including Andrews, in an attempt to intercept more enemy reported in the air, but no contact was made. On 18th February Flight Lieutenant Thomson,[5] an Australian on No. 20 Squadron, did not return from a fighter sweep in the Arakan area.

On 21st February the Spitfires of No. 607 Squadron were scrambled when radar detected over fifty enemy aircraft. The Spitfires made contact and the sky was wreathed with vapour trails during the engagement. Flight Lieutenant Doudy[6] reported one probably destroyed and two damaged, and Flying Officer Goold[7] one damaged.

The air superiority maintained by the Spitfires and Hurricanes during the battle was such that only one Dakota transport aircraft was lost to enemy aircraft, although many were damaged by fire from the ground. In the critical period from 6th February to 6th March 1944, 2,010 short tons of supplies of all kinds, including food, animals and ammunition were delivered. With such help, the ground forces were able to break out of their encirclement and inflict a crushing defeat on the Japanese, who, confident of victory, had brought with them only seven days' rations. They left 5,000 dead on the battlefield and the remainder broke up into small parties which became the hunted instead of the hunters.

During the battle the Australians in No. 224 Group, instead of assisting an offensive, had found themselves involved in a grim defensive battle. More than 600 Vengeance and 900 Hurricane sorties were carried out in close support during the month of February. During the height of the battle Wellingtons of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons were taken off strategic-

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[5] F-Lt J. P. D. Thomson, 401161; 20 Sqn RAF. Carpenter; of Mont Albert, Vic; b. Moreland, Vic, 12 Mar 1916. Killed in action 18 Feb 1944.

[6] Sqn Ldr C. T. Doudy, DFC, 403127. 607 Sqn RAF, 293 Wing and 136 Sqn RAF. Hotel manager; of Tamworth, NSW; b. North Adelaide, 10 Sep 1917.

[7] F-Lt W. A. Goold, DFC, 403135; 607 Sqn RAF. Business director; of Newcastle, NSW; b. Hamilton, NSW, 2 Feb 1919.

bombing missions to carry out direct support of the Arakan. They devastated enemy-held villages with 4,000-lb bombs.

Undoubtedly, supply from the air played a decisive role in the second battle of the Arakan, which was a significant victory in the Burma campaign. By 24th February the forces of XV Corps had joined up again and ten days later the corps resumed its Arakan offensive with full air support.

The focus of events in Burma now moved to the Imphal area where the main enemy blow was to fall. The enemy in this phase, known as "Operation U", had a four-point program:

1. To encircle, starve and destroy IV Corps. (British reserve divisions which might come to the rescue of IV Corps had already been committed in the Arakan, which was the purpose of the Japanese thrust there.)
2. To sever at Dimapur the Bengal-Assam railway which was also the life-line of Stilwell's forces so that the General would be compelled to return to his base at Ledo.
3. To seize the Hump airfields and so dry up finally the supplies to China. This move would also isolate the American Fourteenth Air Force based in China.
4. To march to Delhi.

At Imphal, the British felt themselves to be in a strong position. In addition to IV Corps, Wingate's special force was completing its training there for an operation designed to cut the enemy supply lines in northern Burma. It was a question of whether the British or the Japanese would strike first. Wingate moved first "to insert myself in the guts of the enemy", as he put it. He struck on 5th March, but five days later the Japanese, undeterred by Wingate's move, attacked and broke through the British positions north of Tiddim.

The purpose of the Wingate expedition was to sever the main arteries of supply of the Japanese forces which were opposing Stilwell's march to Myitkyina from the north. He would lead some 12,000 men of the 70th British Division and two Indian brigades far behind the Japanese armies. About 10,000 of them would be flown in, the rest would march through the jungle. The expedition was to be supplied by air and casualties would be flown out by an American air force organisation specially formed for the purpose, known as an "Air Commando Group", led by Colonel Philip Cochran. Operationally, it was under the control of the Third Tactical Air Force.

With Wingate's force went a number of Royal Air Force sections, the task of which would be to organise supply drops, site and supervise the construction of small airstrips on which to land light aircraft behind the enemy's lines, and control close air support. Of the Australians who volunteered for this enterprise eight were accepted and were posted to the 4th, 23rd and 77th Brigades. They were: Squadron Leader Furmage,[8] who commanded all R.A.F. personnel in the 23rd Brigade, of which

[8] Sqn Ldr G. G. Furmage, 408009. 211, 45, 60 Sqns RAF, and 3 PRU; ALO, 5 LRPG 1943-44; 37 Sqn. Clerk; of Devonport, Tas; b. Devonport, 6 Sep 1918.

Flight Lieutenant St John[9] was also a member; Flight Lieutenant George,[1] Flight Lieutenant Roberts;[2] Warrant Officer Tulloh;[3] Warrant Officer Stewardson;[4] Flight Lieutenant Houlgrave[5] and Flight Lieutenant McMillan[6].

Wingate's troops were to land in gliders at two places—"Broadway" and "Piccadilly"—just after dusk. However, aerial photographs taken a few hours before the operation was to begin showed that somebody had obstructed the Piccadilly strip with teak logs laid in rows and hidden by buffalo grass. Broadway appeared to be clear and Slim, Wingate and Cochran decided to concentrate all their gliders on Broadway. At dusk on 5th March the first gliders shuddered into the air. Many crashed at Broadway, resulting in 31 deaths, but the strip was held and within another 24 hours was ready to receive transport aircraft.

Flight Lieutenant George, who was in charge of one of the gliders, found the flarepath alight on arrival at Broadway, but he noted that many gliders were scattered all over the field instead of being parked on the edge of the jungle. His glider touched down, but another suddenly appeared in front and it had to "jump" over the second glider and touch down again, finally stopping in a hole some 1,200 yards away from the flarepath. No one in the glider was injured and everything was quiet except for the drone of a bulldozer already at work preparing the strip.

On the night of 6th-7th March, George and Roberts were engaged in signalling aircraft, marshalling them in, unloading them and getting them into the air before the next wave arrived. On this night also, further landings were made at Chowringhee. Less difficulty was met here and the airstrip was immediately prepared for use.

The initial phase of this operation was completed by 11th March and its success can be measured by the following statistics of sorties flown and men and equipment moved:

| | |
|---|---|
| Dakota sorties . . . | 579 |
| Glider sorties . . . | 74 |
| Persons moved . . . | 9,052 |
| Animals moved . . . | 1,359 |
| Stores moved . . . | 254 tons |

The transport aircraft which had achieved this result had weathered a period of intense strain and by exerting the maximum effort had achieved their purpose. The aircraft engaged were drawn from the No. 1 Air Com-

[9] Sqn Ldr D. St John, 402939. 66, 501 and 146 Sqns RAF; RAF Special Force India 1943-44; ALO, 5 LRGP 1944. Transport driver; of North Ryde, NSW; b. Wellington, NZ, 11 May 1916.

[1] Sqn Ldr L. G. George, DFC, 400238. 211 and 45 Sqns RAF; ALO, 2 LRPG 1943-44; 163 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Cowell, SA; b. Cowell, 6 Jan 1919.

[2] F-Lt A. C. Roberts, 402007. 607 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn and 258 Sqn RAF; ALO, Wingate's LRPG, 1943-44. Joiner; of Lismore, NSW; b. Lismore, 9 Oct 1916.

[3] F-O C. R. Tulloh, 408745. 353 Sqn RAF; ALO, Wingate's LRPG 1943-44; 257 Sqn RAF. Storeman; of Wagga Wagga, NSW; b. Parkville, Vic, 15 Feb 1921.

[4] P-O H. W. Stewardson, 412743. 353 Sqn RAF; ALO, 2 LRPG 1943-44. Plumber; of Macquarie Fields, NSW; b. Wilton, NSW, 21 Aug 1915.

[5] F-Lt H. R. C. Houlgrave, 407293. 20, 60 Sqns RAF; ALO, 2 LRPG 1943-44; 102 Sqn. Civil servant; of Kilkenny, SA; b. Adelaide, 19 May 1921.

[6] Sqn Ldr P. L. McMillan, 401140. 20 Sqn RAF; ALO, 2 LRPG 1944; 20 Sqn RAF. Salesman-mechanic; of Malvern, Vic; b. Geelong, Vic, 19 Nov 1920.

mando Group, Nos. 27 and 315 Troop Carrier Squadrons, and Nos. 31, 62, 117 and 194 Squadrons, R.A.F., in which there was a large representation of Australians. No. 117 was commanded by a West Australian, Squadron Leader McLean.[7] Throughout the stay of Wingate's expedition these squadrons dropped supplies to his men. Wingate himself, the brain and driving force behind the expedition, was killed on 24th March in an air crash.

The smooth assembly and fly-in of the large number of aircraft was again made possible by the high degree of air superiority of the Allied air forces. The enemy air force was kept on the defensive and was unaware even of the activity at Broadway in the vital early stage. Enemy attempts at deep reconnaissance were defeated by Spitfires. Two from No. 81 Squadron shot down a Dinah east of Imphal on 4th March, and two days later Flying Officer Cronin,[8] an Australian on this squadron, shot down another south-east of Palel. Some days later a detachment of this squadron was sent to Broadway, and on 13th March the pilots intercepted a formation of over thirty enemy aircraft, and destroyed four. Cronin was credited with one of the victims.

Wingate's forces had been transported to the focal centre of four Japanese divisions, and his columns now began to spread out over the land cutting the arteries of the enemy supply and so easing Stilwell's task as he moved southwards towards Myitkyina.

Meanwhile, the Japanese army, in spite of this threat to its rear, had begun its main offensive towards India. Suddenly Imphal became the danger point. The enemy struck with great speed and nimbleness and severed the road between Imphal and Tiddim so that the 17th Indian Division was cut off. However, aided by Hurricane fighter bombers which smashed the road blocks, the division eluded the trap and arrived back at Imphal. Then, to the north, the enemy surrounded Kohima and cut the Dimapur road so that there was no way out of the Imphal valley.

Mountbatten decided to supply IV Corps by air transports and also ordered that the 5th Indian Division be flown up from the Arakan to reinforce the garrison, which now totalled four divisions and a half. The fate of this garrison would depend largely on how many transport aircraft could be mustered to supply them. Mountbatten called for more transports, and two days after the Imphal-Dimapur road was cut, General Maitland Wilson, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, ordered seventy-nine troop carrier aircraft to leave Italy for Karachi. By the second week in April these Dakotas were helping to ferry supplies into Imphal or dropping food and ammunition to the garrison of Kohima.

Again, during this crisis at Imphal, the bombers of Nos. 99, 215 and 355 Squadrons were diverted from strategic to tactical targets. On 17th

[7] W Cdr W. J. McLean, DSO, DFC, AFC, 406112. Comd 117 Sqn RAF 1944-45, 245 Sqn RAF 1945-46. School teacher; of Waroona, WA; b. Katanning, WA, 9 Jul 1918.

[8] F-O L. F. M. Cronin, DFC, 400913. 453 Sqn, 81 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Canterbury, Vic; b. Camberwell, Vic, 17 Jul 1918.

March No. 355 Squadron bombed enemy dumps and stores at Kalewa. The following night, Wellingtons of No. 99 Squadron also struck at stores and dumps in this area. On 19th March ten Wellingtons of No. 215 attacked Kalewa. Other targets hit during March by the British bomber squadrons were Rangoon and Prome.

In April, as the threat to the Imphal plain assumed serious proportions, Mitchells and Wellingtons began an almost daily assault upon enemy communications. The Mitchells carried out low-level daylight sweeps and the Wellingtons took up the role of intruders by night. The sum of these attacks contributed greatly to the constant shortage and slow transit of men and supplies which dogged the enemy throughout his offensive. During the height of battle Wellingtons were called on to give direct support and they went out in daylight escorted by fighters. Then the Wellingtons had to be withdrawn to help in air supply and Liberators replaced them on these tasks.

During the Imphal battle the struggle for air supremacy grew fiercer. The Japanese brought up a large number of aircraft to their forward airfields for use in their attempt to take Imphal. However, attacks by Third Tactical Air Force resulted in the destruction of sixty-one on the ground. During attacks on Allied installations the enemy lost further fighters, although the difficulties of defence were increased by poor radar coverage at Imphal and this in turn was partly due to the fact that more and more of the early warning systems were overrun as the Japanese army advanced.

Eastern Air Command fighters increased the pressure on the enemy in April and in this month claimed the destruction of 107 enemy planes. In May the enemy lost 85. Many of the successes in the three months period March-May were scored by American long-range fighters (Mustangs and Lightnings) which caught the enemy fighters on the ground. These aircraft with their longer reach were used on offensive operations whilst the Spitfires in short supply "had to be husbanded for purely defensive work".[9]

Australians in No. 123 (Hurricane) Squadron were engaged in an aerial battle over Silchar on 12th March when they were scrambled at 10 in the morning to intercept twenty-nine fighters at 18,000 feet. The squadron was surprised by twenty Oscars and Hamps, and although the enemy had the advantage they suffered three fighters damaged as against two Hurricanes. Flight Sergeant Oliff[1] was credited with damaging one of the Oscars. After scoring hits on an enemy fighter, Oliff was attacked by three from ahead and astern. He fired two bursts and took violent evasive action, finishing up in a vertical spiral dive. He pulled out at 1,500 feet and then climbed into the sun.

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[9] Air Chief Marshal Sir R. E. C. Peirse, *Despatch on Air Operations in South East Asia 16th November 1943 to 31st May 1944.*

[1] F-O J. E. Oliff, 403530. 234, 213 and 123 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Coogee, NSW; b. Clovelly, NSW, 1 May 1922.

On 25th April three Spitfires of No. 615 Squadron (one flown by Flight Lieutenant Falconer[2] and another by Gannon) intercepted nine Oscars some forty miles from their base at Silchar on IV Corps' front. Gannon probably destroyed an Oscar. The squadron was in action again next day, 40 miles south of Imphal and McCormack and Andrews each scored a probable. On 28th April the squadron provided fighter escort to Wellingtons which carried out a daylight bombing mission against enemy installations at Kalewa.

No. 607 was engaged against Oscars over Palel on 11th May. In one clash Goold closed to within 75 yards of an Oscar, almost line astern, and opened fire. The Oscar burst into flames and plummeted to the earth. The Japanese pilot bailed out. Goold distinguished himself again on 18th May when his squadron clashed with a formation of forty Oscars near Bishenpur. The Oscars were scattered about the sky at varying heights and in various formations. Goold ordered the squadron to attack as far as possible line abreast and led them in. In the battle which followed the squadron lost one pilot, while Goold was credited with one Oscar destroyed and two others damaged.

On 25th May and again on 29th, No. 615 was engaged against large formations of enemy fighters. McCormack damaged two and another was probably destroyed on 25th May, while on 29th May McCormack and Gannon each destroyed one Oscar. The fight took place over the Imphal valley and McCormack was forced to crash-land on a near-by airfield after his aircraft had developed a glycol leak. He was injured and was admitted to hospital. Warrant Officer Young,[3] another Australian who, this day, was on his second operational sortie with the squadron, crashed south-west of Palel and was killed.

Vengeances of No. 84 Squadron were heavily engaged during March in operations against the Japanese advancing in the Tiddim area. Twelve aircraft from this squadron were detailed on the 13th March to dive-bomb an enemy headquarters. They attacked the area but observed only smoke afterwards. They carried out two more missions on 18th March striking on the Imphal-Tiddim road near Tiddim, returning again on 21st March. Some of these strikes were led by Flight Lieutenant Goldfinch.[4]

On 29th March, late in the evening, Hurricanes of No. 28 Squadron based at Imphal were suddenly called in to strafe a battalion of Japanese about ten miles north-east of their airfield. Pilots were airborne within fifteen minutes. Altogether, thirty-three aircraft from four squadrons were engaged and the action was successful. An Australian, Flight Lieutenant Guymer,[5] took part and completed his sortie with the pitot head cover still on his Hurricane, which prevented the airspeed indicator from

[2] Sqn Ldr G. Falconer, 404732; 615 Sqn RAF. Law clerk; of Toowoomba, Qld; b. Toowoomba, 5 Apr 1922.

[3] W-O H. K. Young, 414148; 615 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Longreach, Qld; b. Longreach, 8 Oct 1922. Killed in action 29 May 1944.

[4] F-Lt J. H. Goldfinch, 402655; 84 Sqn RAF. Sugar chemist; of Sydney; b. Macknade, Qld, 27 Jun 1913.

[5] Sqn Ldr A. E. Guymer, 406016. 500 and 28 Sqns RAF. School teacher; of Innisfail, Qld; b. Warwick, Qld, 20 Feb 1911.

functioning. Operating through April and May, Australian pilots on this squadron took part in many fighter-bomber sorties in the Kohima-Tiddim areas.

Australians on No. 84 Vengeance Squadron continued in April and May to carry out almost daily operations during the battle. On 17th April Goldfinch led twelve aircraft in an attack on enemy positions seventeen miles from Imphal. The ground troops indicated the target by mortar smoke, then No. 110 Squadron attacked followed by Goldfinch at the head of No. 84 Squadron. The operation was successful, all bombs falling in the target area. Later in the day a message was received from IV Corps headquarters advising that the Vengeances had scored a "bullseye". Army units went in after the dive bombing and occupied the position with little opposition. On 23rd April fifteen aircraft from this squadron bombed in support of the Long-Range Penetration Group and next day Goldfinch led another twelve aircraft in a successful raid at Kohima.

On 19th April the squadron attacked enemy positions one mile north of Kanglatongbi (near Kohima). They achieved good results in difficult circumstances as cloud over the target allowed a dive of only 2,000 feet. Other aircraft from Nos. 110, 7 (Indian Air Force) and a Hurricane squadron took part in the attack. The IV Corps Situation Report for 19th April reads ". . . air strike by four squadrons of aircraft on Kanglatongbi successful, and attack was put in by infantry with tank support. Limited objectives captured and consolidated with light casualties to us. . . ." On this day, Australians took part in the operations of seven squadrons—Nos. 84, 134, 215, 607, 615, 160 and 42.

At Palel the garrison was closely pressed by the enemy and at night the pilots slept in foxholes within a defensive "box" about 500 yards square. Warrant Officer Cann,[6] describing his experiences at Palel, said:

> At dusk, small parties of Japs would come down from the hills in which the airstrip lay and our box would be subjected to mortar fire . . . a monotonous diet of bully beef and biscuits did not make our positions any more attractive. . . . A number of Ghurkas were flown into Palel to reinforce our airfield defences which consisted mainly of [men of the] R.A.F. regiment. We were using as a hospital a small basha hut about twenty yards from the perimeter of our "box". One night a small Jap patrol infiltrated our defences and burst into the hospital, cutting the throats of several of the patients, and quickly disappearing. We heard the shouts and screams, but it was too late to do anything. . . . The war was mighty close, and we realised it even more so by the fact that our bombing and strafing attacks on these Japs did not involve going far beyond our normal circuit area. We would take off, do a wide circuit, drop our bombs and carry on in the circuit area until it was our turn to land on the strip to refuel and rearm.

At the end of April the situation had reached a climax. The British army of four divisions and a half was encircled while the besieging Japanese were themselves blockaded by the Allied air forces. Both faced disaster unless the flow of supplies could be increased. The coming invasion of Europe now threatened to reduce air supply to the Imphal

[6] W-O M. J. Cann, 411678. 186 and 42 Sqns RAF. Window dresser; of Stockton, NSW; b. West Maitland, NSW, 28 Aug 1921.

plain, because the 79 transports lent by the Mediterranean Command were due to be recalled. Mountbatten signalled on 1st May to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff informing them of the dire alternatives that faced the Allies in India if these borrowed American squadrons returned to Italy. Then on 4th May Mr Churchill signalled Mountbatten: "Let nothing go from the battle that you need for victory. I will not accept denial of this from any quarter, and will back you to the full." The air transports stayed.

For several weeks more the Japanese hung on with great determination. They were dying of wounds, disease and starvation. But on 22nd June, eighty days after the siege began, the road between Imphal and Dimapur was open again. A Sikh battalion of IV Corps pushing north of Imphal met tanks of XXXIII Corps fighting their way south from Dimapur. After the victory had been won, and the enemy was in retreat, Mountbatten signalled to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and to Churchill his thanks for their aid: "There is no doubt," he said, "that these aircraft [referring to the transports] turned the tide of battle against the Japanese and have altogether altered the outlook in Northern Burma."

CHAPTER 17

# REDEPLOYMENT

THE successful penetration of the western wall of *Festung Europa* by the Anglo-American armies and their lodgment in Normandy, followed by the liberation of Paris, had brought the European war within measurable sight of its end, and there was now, especially in the British and American camps, a quickening of interest in the war against Japan. Within weeks of D-day on the Normandy beaches, landing craft needed for the conduct of war in the vast reaches of the Pacific Ocean were headed for the Pacific by way of Panama. General Kenney had been informed that he could expect considerable reinforcements of aircraft, and men to fly them, as the war in Europe seemed likely soon to end. A powerful British fleet to be used "in decisive operations against Japan" was preparing to move to the Pacific.

For some months the Australian Prime Minister, Mr Curtin, looking beyond the military victory to the political consequences of the Pacific war, had been urging on Mr Churchill the need for showing the British flag as prominently as possible in the closing stages of the struggle. On 4th July he had cabled to Churchill urging the early assignment of a British naval task force to South-West Pacific Area. The coming operations by General MacArthur against the Philippines and Borneo, he said, would present an ideal opportunity for the employment of the British naval task force. "It not only would contribute in great measure to the acceleration of the operations, but would be the naval spearhead in a large portion of this campaign. It is the only effective means of placing the Union Jack in the Pacific alongside the Australian and American flags. It would evoke great public enthusiasm in Australia and would contribute greatly to the restoration of Empire prestige in the Far East. The opportunity that presents itself is very real, but the pace of events here demands immediate action." In another cable five weeks later Curtin said: "I am deeply concerned at the position that would arise in our Far East if any considerable American opinion were to hold that America fought a war on principle in the Far East and won it relatively unaided while the other Allies, including ourselves, did very little towards recovering our lost property. . . . I put this matter to you frankly as one of deep and far-reaching consequence to our future role and prestige in the Pacific sphere."

In his reply, Churchill said that a strong British fleet which by mid-1945 would probably comprise four battleships, six fleet carriers, four light carriers, fifteen escort carriers, twenty cruisers, forty escorts and a considerable fleet train was being built up as fast as possible and that it was hoped they would be used in the "crucial operations" leading to an assault on Japan. If the American Joint Chiefs of Staff were unable to accept the British fleet in the main operations, then Churchill would suggest to them the formation of a British Empire task force consisting of

British, Australian and New Zealand land, sea and air forces to operate in the South-West Pacific under General MacArthur's supreme command.[1]

In September the question of future British participation in the war against Japan would come up for discussion at the OCTAGON conference at Quebec—a conference of great importance for the Pacific war. There was little likelihood that Churchill, who in 1942 had declared, "I have not become the King's First Minister in order to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire", would fail to use every opportunity to regain as much as possible of Britain's prestige in the Pacific. However, American leaders were equally determined that the world should know that the Pacific war was essentially an American victory, were frequently outspoken about "imperialism", and openly advocated that it was high time Britain, France and Holland gave up their colonies in Asia.[2] MacArthur, according to Admiral Leahy,[3] contended that the British "should not be allowed to assume control of any territory that we recaptured from the enemy". Admiral Leahy added: "I suspected that the Australians, in this matter, were in complete agreement with MacArthur." In this respect Leahy was mistaken.

At Quebec in September, Churchill offered to the Americans not only the main British fleet but a large part of the R.A.F. Bomber Command, comprising from 500 to 1,000 heavy bombers. President Roosevelt accepted the offer. Not only did he welcome British participation but he was anxious to see that Russia also should come in against the Japanese because he believed that a long and costly struggle still lay ahead.[4]

At a plenary session of the Quebec conference, Churchill said his government wanted British ships and troops to take part in the war against Japan in order to do Britain's part. He reiterated on several occasions that it was necessary that British forces should retake Singapore which had been the scene of the greatest blow to British prestige in the Far East.

However, when the subject of British participation came up at a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, there was soon evidence that the American chiefs of staff were not eager to have the British taking a major part in the Pacific. General Arnold describing the meeting said "everything went along normally and without excitement until the British again brought up the question of participation in the Pacific. Then all hell broke loose! Admiral King could not agree that there was a place for the

[1] Churchill suggested that the task force should be under a British commander and Curtin in his reply and in later correspondence took strong exception to this proposal because it would disturb the existing arrangement by which MacArthur controlled the Australian forces, engaged in SWPA.

[2] Chester Wilmot points out (in *The Struggle for Europe*, 1952, pp. 714-15) that while the Americans disavowed political aims in their conduct of the war against Germany, it was not so in the case of Japan. He said that the Americans believed that the sole aim should be victory, nothing else. "Since America fights for no political objective, except peace, no political directives should be given to American commanders in the field. They should be completely free to determine their strategy on military grounds alone. . . . To pursue a political aim is to practise Imperialism. This was the doctrine applied by Marshall and his colleagues in the conduct of the war against Germany, although, with an ambivalence not uncharacteristic of the American people, it was not always applied in relation to the war against Japan."

[3] W. D. Leahy, *I Was There* (Eng edn, 1950), p. 296.

[4] E. R. Stettinius in *Roosevelt and the Russians* (1949) said that the American Chiefs of Staff had warned Roosevelt that without Russia it might cost the U.S. a million casualties to conquer Japan.

British Navy in the Pacific, except for a very small force. The American Navy had carried the war all the way from Honolulu to the west and it would carry it on to Japan!"[5] Admiral Cunningham, the First Sea Lord, who attended this meeting said that Admiral Leahy sharply called Admiral King to order and that he "eventually gave way, but with a very bad grace".[6]

The resentment of some of the Americans was heightened all the more by the belief held in some quarters that the Japanese were already virtually defeated. Leahy for example said that "by the beginning of September, Japan was almost defeated through a practically complete sea and air blockade". He was against the army proposal that there should be an invasion of Japanese home territory. "My conclusion, with which the naval representatives agreed," he wrote, "was that America's least expensive course of action was to continue and intensify the air and sea blockade and at the same time to occupy the Philippines. I believed that a completely blockaded Japan would then fall by its own weight."[7]

Apart from politics and national pride there were the vital questions of bases and logistics to be considered. Indeed the biggest problem in the Pacific war now was to find room and facilities to deploy the immense forces that would soon become available from Europe. Since it was generally believed at this time that the war in Europe would probably end in 1944, preparations for the movement of forces against Japan were becoming a matter of urgency.

Churchill discussed the question of bases for his R.A.F. squadrons with Arnold who said: "I told him the question of putting planes in there wasn't quite that simple. There were not enough land masses in the Pacific Ocean to use the heavy bombers we would have available from Europe when that phase of the war was over. As a matter of fact, if we could use 1,500 of the 3,500 we had in the E.T.O. we would be very, very lucky."[8] Arnold said that Churchill turned to him and asked: "With all your wealth of airdromes, you would not deny me the mere pittance of a few for my heavy bombers, would you?" Arnold said he assured him that was something for the Combined Chiefs to decide. As far as he was concerned the Superfortresses were moving in—they had already started their operations and the Americans planned to use all the airfields available at Guam, Saipan, Tinian and Iwo Jima. If the Combined Chiefs decided to replace Superfortresses with Lancasters that was all right with him. The Royal Canadian Air Force also wanted to send forty-seven squadrons to the Pacific. Nobody knew where they were going to be based and the question was never firmly decided.

The over-all objective decided on was to force the unconditional surrender of Japan by (*a*) lowering Japanese ability and will to resist by

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[5] H. H. Arnold, *Global Mission*, p. 527.

[6] Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey* (1951), p. 612.

[7] Leahy, p. 305.

[8] Arnold, p. 526. (E.T.O.—European Theatre of Operations.)

establishing sea and air blockades, conducting intensive air bombardment and destroying Japanese air and naval strength, and (*b*) ultimately invading and seizing objectives in the industrial heart of Japan.

At the final meeting at the Quebec Citadel on 18th September the Combined Chiefs agreed that for the purposes of the planning of production and allotment of manpower, the end of the war against Japan should be set at eighteen months after the defeat of Germany. This date would be reviewed periodically in the light of developments. There was no decision on specific operations in the Pacific, and it was assumed without question that the Americans would continue to exercise command in the final phase of the war. The policy in Burma would not be to push all the way down from the north because the enemy with his communications behind him would be at an advantage, but to carry out combined sea, land and air operations against Rangoon. It was agreed to press unremitting submarine action against enemy ships and to step up the long-range air bombardment of Japan from the Marianas, from China and from other bases to be prepared.

In 1942, when they were formed, the first objective of both South-West Pacific Area and South Pacific Area had been to advance along two mutually-supporting axes to the same goal—Rabaul. Rabaul had not fallen but had been neutralised and its garrison largely cut off from the outside world. The last operational mission given to the forces of the South Pacific Area was a landing in March 1944 on Emirau Island. This had been carried out successfully, and there was now no further function for this command apart from garrisoning the northern Solomons where a large number of by-passed Japanese remained. On the other hand, South-West Pacific Area, after establishing bases along the northern coast of New Guinea and in Morotai was now poised to attack the Philippine Islands.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had therefore decided to disband South Pacific Area. Admiral Halsey, its commander, was reassigned to the Central Pacific and most of the units of South Pacific were handed over to South-West Pacific Area. This development considerably increased the power of MacArthur's command, but in the coming months he would need all the ground and naval forces he could muster.

The Joint Chiefs gave the XIV Corps (Major-General Oscar W. Griswold), its corps troops, and the 25th, 37th, 43rd, 93rd and Americal Divisions to MacArthur, while I Marine Corps, its corps troops, and the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions were handed over to Pacific Ocean Area. South-West Pacific Area also received the entire Thirteenth Air Force, together with Navy and Marine air units and Royal New Zealand Air Force units.

The six divisions from the Solomons increased MacArthur's total of American divisions to twelve, and by September 1944, with the adding of Sibert's X Corps and Hodge's XXIV Corps, he controlled eighteen

American divisions in addition to two Australian corps—Morshead's I and Savige's II.[9]

MacArthur's policy of establishing air and naval bases in areas otherwise held by strong enemy garrisons, while it avoided the heavy losses that might be expected if he were to attempt to destroy the enemy concentrations, had the disadvantage of tying up large numbers of troops to hold the perimeters protecting those bases. Of his eighteen American divisions six and one-third were tied down to the containment of by-passed enemy forces in Bougainville, New Britain and New Guinea, and others were similarly employed elsewhere. It had been necessary also to assign many American, Australian and New Zealand air units to air garrison duties in support of these divisions.

MacArthur needed these divisions for his assault on the Philippines where there were believed to be a total of thirteen Japanese divisions, and he solved the problem by handing over to the Australians garrison duties in all the bases in Australian New Guinea, except one—Manus. In a letter to General Blamey on 12th July, notifying him of the plan to hand responsibility over to the Australians, MacArthur said:

> A redistribution of Allied forces in SWPA is necessitated by the advance to the Philippine Islands. Exclusive of the Admiralties, it is desired that Australian forces assume the responsibility for the continued neutralisation of the enemy in Australian and British territory and mandates in the SWPA by the following dates:
>
> Northern Solomons—Green Island—Emirau—1 Oct 1944
> Australian New Guinea—1 Nov 1944
> New Britain—1 Nov 1944
>
> So that intensive preparations may be instituted for future operations, forces [i.e. US forces] now assigned combat missions in the above areas should be relieved of combat responsibility not later than the specified dates. It is desired to use 2 AIF divs in the advance to the Philippine Islands, one div to be made available by Nov 44 and the other by Jan 45.

In his reply Blamey said that the 3rd Division, comprising the 6th and 23rd Brigades and one commando squadron, would be available to take over in the northern Solomons, Green Island area, and suggested that, because of its nearness to the Admiralties, Emirau should be garrisoned by American forces. However, on 2nd August MacArthur's chief of staff demurred both on this point and on Blamey's suggestion that two brigades together with one commando squadron would suffice in Bougainville. The minimum requirements he considered were:

> Emirau Island—1 battalion reinforced
> Green Island—1 battalion reinforced
> Treasury and New Georgia—1 battalion reinforced
> Bougainville—4 brigades.

MacArthur's chief of staff pointed out also that the garrison duty in the Aitape-Sepik area was a major undertaking requiring four Australian brigades, and that three brigades would be needed for the New Britain role. Blamey thereupon decided to allot his II Corps to replace

[9] From May to October the title of the force which before and after that period was "II Corps" was "New Guinea Force".

the American XIV Corps at Torokina, Bougainville. The 5th Division would be assigned to New Britain while the 6th would take over responsibility for the Aitape area. "The foregoing dispositions," said Blamey in a report to the Advisory War Council, "would require practically all the fighting troops now in Australia. The garrison in Western Australia was being reduced to a minimum, and that in the Northern Territory was being substantially reduced. Air strength in the Northern Territory virtually precluded an enemy landing, but it was still necessary to retain some troops there. . . . In addition to the above activities, which would absorb four divisions, the C-in-C S.W.P.A. desired to establish an expeditionary force for further operations. This would consist of the 7th and 9th Divisions, making up I Corps which was now being prepared under Lieut-General Morshead."[1]

The Americans in the by-passed areas had been content merely to hold defensive perimeters, usually with a force larger than the enemy forces in the immediate area. They considered these isolated enemy forces should be left to "wither on the vine". There was no sense in "kicking a corpse around". However, Blamey in his report to the Advisory War Council foreshadowed more active operations by the Australians in Bougainville.[2] He said that "the Torokina perimeter had been an inactive area since it was established by the United States forces. The Australian Military Forces would not perhaps be quite so passive. Native troops would be available for scouting in the area and it was hoped to locate bodies of enemy troops which were known to be in the vicinity."

Curtin was anxious that Australian troops should go forward to the Philippines and keep up with the van of Allied forces until the end of the Pacific war. There was some fear that the assignment of Australians to containing the Japanese in by-passed areas would absorb too much effort on secondary tasks.[3] However, Japanese were at large on Australian mandated territory and rounding them up was obviously more an Australian than an American responsibility. "We could not," said Curtin,[4] "escape the logic of the decision that Australian troops should garrison the islands which formed our outer screen of defence and which were mostly our own territory. In addition to these forces, however, we would have two divisions for the Philippines operations and this would ensure the Australian flag going forward with that of the United States . . . the British government and the Australian government were fully aware of the necessity of maintaining British prestige in the Pacific and were aware also that British prestige could only be restored by the presence of British forces in the war against Japan."

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[1] Advisory War Council Minute 1405, 7 Sep.

[2] Advisory War Council Minute 1405, 7 Sep.

[3] Blamey had anticipated that MacArthur would require the Australians to garrison their own territory, but had come to the conclusion that 3 Australian militia divisions would be able to take over the task then being carried out by 6½ American divisions. However, MacArthur's directive called for a minimum of 4 divisions and it became necessary for Blamey to assign the 6th Division which he had planned to hold in reserve. When these 4 divisions in addition to I Corps comprising the 7th and 9th Divisions were committed, Australia would have six divisions engaged against the Japanese.

[4] Advisory War Council Minute 1405, 7 Sep.

In the second half of 1944, the Australian manpower problem, to which War Cabinet devoted considerable attention, became acute. Australia was not only maintaining large forces in the field, but was also producing war materials and food for the United Kingdom and India, as well as contributing to the maintenance of American forces. By December 1943 Australian manpower was distributed as follows:

26.0 per cent in the A.M.F., R.A.A.F., and R.A.N.
14.7 per cent in munitions industries
30.7 per cent in other essential industries
21.7 per cent in less essential industries
6.9 per cent in all others.

Curtin had proposed at a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington on 2nd June that in order to provide more men and women for industry and agriculture the army should be reduced to six divisions and two armoured brigades. However, the R.A.A.F. would be built up to and maintained at fifty-three squadrons by December 1944, exclusive of three R.A.F. squadrons and two N.E.I. squadrons serving with the R.A.A.F.

At the end of February the army had contained 464,000 men and women, and Blamey had said that the reduction of the army to six divisions and two armoured brigades would mean that the army could progressively release 90,000 men.[5] General Marshall informed General MacArthur on 3rd June of Curtin's proposals and asked for his comments. MacArthur replied that Curtin's proposals were acceptable providing that units were maintained at strength and were available for combat, otherwise commitments for less strength were preferable. The Australian proposals were approved on the following basis:

(*a*) The AMF would be maintained at 6 divs and 2 armed bdes for actual operations.
(*b*) The RAN would be maintained at its present level, and would, in addition, man ships to be made available through the Australian naval construction program.
(*c*) By Dec 44, the RAAF would be built up and maintained at 53 squadrons, excluding—
3 RAF squadrons in Australia.
2 NEI squadrons in Australia.
2 RAAF squadrons permanently based overseas.
RAAF squadrons committed to EATS.
RAAF ground and service personnel overseas.
(*d*) Food commitments to the United Kingdom would be maintained at the 1944 level.

In order to fill the gap in industrial manpower needs Curtin directed that the Defence Committee make an estimate of the manpower necessary to maintain the Services at this new level, but instead of recommending reductions, the Defence Committee suggested a big increase in the monthly intake of men to the Services and a reduction in the intake of women.

[5] War Cabinet Minute 3691, 4 Aug 1944.

In spite of this report, Curtin, on 4th August, directed the committee to review the position again on the basis of a reduction of 30,000 men in the strength of the A.M.F. and 15,000 men in the strength of the R.A.A.F.[6] Of these 45,000 releases, 20,000 were to be made by 31st December 1944 and the remaining 25,000 by 30th June 1945. On 23rd August in the face of protests from the Services, the War Cabinet reduced the monthly intake for the three Services from 5,000 to 4,020, including 1,020 women. Blamey, writing to Curtin on 26th September, pointed out that the new responsibility for containing the Japanese in by-passed areas meant that he needed another 10,000 more men for operations and the maintenance of forces in widely-dispersed places. He claimed that the Air Force strength of 173,000 was 25,000 above establishment.

The Chief of the Air Staff in August had stated that because of developments in the European theatre and the cancellation of further drafts of aircrew overseas under the Empire Air Training Scheme, a surplus of aircrew had been built up and aircrew were to be asked to remuster as ground staff. Obviously the need for aircrew releases from the army had diminished and in September 1944, the army issued an instruction forbidding any further releases to the R.A.A.F. The Director of Recruiting, Group Captain Chadwick,[7] protested. However, because of unsatisfactory reports of the behaviour and discipline of ex-army aircrew trainees in Canada, the Chief of the Air Staff no longer felt inclined to press for recruits from this source, and discussion on the subject ceased.

Blamey protested strongly at the insistence of the War Cabinet that reductions be made in spite of his warnings of anticipated casualties and losses when, by June 1945, there would be six divisions and an armoured brigade in action, and that he would be forced to inform MacArthur that the Australian army would not be able to maintain the strength allotted. It was not until the following February that the War Cabinet met to consider the manpower position again and, when it did, decided to adhere to the decisions of the previous August. The Cabinet rejected the Defence Committee's recommendation that the Services' intake of men should be increased from 3,000 to 4,200; the Service intake would remain at 3,000 monthly, of which the Navy would receive 600, the Army 1,500 and the R.A.A.F. 900.

General Kenney was faced with the problem of deploying and controlling the very large air forces he now commanded. Within his command he now had not only Fifth Air Force, R.A.A.F. Command, No. 10 Operational Group, and air units of the Seventh Fleet, but also the Thirteenth Air Force of six and a quarter groups, a Marine air group, American naval squadrons and units of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, all of which he had inherited from the now defunct South Pacific Area. Kenney sought approval from Washington to form a new Headquarters—"Far

[6] Minute 4 Aug 1944. (Quoted in War Cabinet Minute 3691, Supplement No. 1.)

[7] Gp Capt A. E. Chadwick, MSM, 250987. (No. 1 Sqn Aust Flying Corps 1916-19.) Dir of Recruiting 1942-44, of Manning 1944-45. Sales controller; of Tungamah, Vic; b. Beechworth, Vic, 15 Nov 1897.

East Air Forces"—to control both the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces. Kenney would be commanding general of F.E.A.F. while continuing also to be commander of Allied Air Forces, through which he would control R.A.A.F. Command and all other air units assigned to South-West Pacific Area. Washington approved of the formation of F.E.A.F., and orders were issued on 14th June 1944, effective the following day. Major-General Ennis C. Whitehead was appointed commander of the Fifth and Major-General St Clair Streett commander of the Thirteenth, with headquarters at Los Negros where most of his bomber squadrons were then based. They assumed command on 15th June.

Kenney was informed that within three months of the European war ending he would be reinforced with 1,200 aircraft making the total in Far East Air Force 3,200, in addition to which he had another 1,200 aircraft in the R.A.A.F., R.N.Z.A.F. and the Dutch Air Forces.[8]

Kenney had decided that the Fifth Air Force would be the assault force in most of the operations from June 1944 onwards. The Thirteenth Air Force, which was much smaller in size, was to be assigned mainly to supporting roles, which was the cause of some chaffing on the part of the Thirteenth's staff officers.[9] He also dropped No. 10 Group from Fifth Air Force control and proposed that it, like the Australian army, should carry out garrison duties in the New Guinea area. Hence, the Fifth Air Force would carry the assault to the Philippines, while the Thirteenth Air Force and the R.A.A.F. were to be left behind to carry out supporting and garrison operations only.

Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, noting that Kenney had dropped No. 10 Group from current operations instructions, signalled him on 11th September asking for "some indication of your intentions regarding employment of this group during the next few months". General Beebe, the chief of staff of Far East Air Force, replied to Bostock, saying that a letter was being prepared containing full information on future operations. However, Bostock, anxious to avoid having the R.A.A.F. confined to garrison duties in New Guinea, conferred personally both with Beebe and Curtin on the subject of the future operational role of R.A.A.F. Command. As with the army it was the Prime Minister's wish that the air force should be represented in forward operations, but that the first requirement was adequate air support of the Australian land forces. He told Bostock during an interview on 14th September that the following principles should be followed: (*a*) that the R.A.A.F. operational squadrons had been assigned to the Commander-in-Chief, South-West Pacific Area, and their employment was therefore a matter for his decision; (*b*) the first requirement was adequate air support for Australian Land Forces by the Allied Air Forces; (*c*) wherever major Australian land forces are stationed in operational areas in contact with the enemy, R.A.A.F. air cover should be available to them to the greatest extent practicable within our resources; (*d*) for the purposes of cooperation with the Australian

[8] Kenney, pp. 420-21.

[9] Craven and Cate (Editors), *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Vol IV (1950), p. 651.

land forces in the forthcoming offensive operations in the South-West Pacific Area and for other operations therein, it is desirable that a R.A.A.F. tactical air force should be maintained as an integrated formation of such strength as may be practicable; (*e*) mopping-up and air garrison duties in (1) British and (2) foreign reoccupied territories would be undertaken by the R.A.A.F. in that order, only after the commitments set out above were provided for.[1]

Bostock agreed with these principles and they were also endorsed by the Advisory War Council. Curtin had agreed that No. 10 Group should be renamed First Tactical Air Force, and appropriate orders were issued. Even if circumstances prevented the retention of the tactical air force as an integrated formation, every effort was to be made to ensure that the R.A.A.F. was represented with the Allied Air Forces by individual wings or even by separate squadrons in the advance against Japan in the S.W.P.A.

Bostock after discussing the role of the R.A.A.F. with Curtin then took the matter up with Beebe at the headquarters of F.E.A.F. at Hollandia. Beebe although not meeting all Bostock's requests, agreed that No. 10 Group (Nos. 77, 78 and 81 Wings) would for the present remain in Noemfoor and be allotted to the Thirteenth Air Force instead of to the Fifth Air Force. Every effort would be made to keep the units comprising No. 10 Group together as a tactical force. No. 71 Wing would remain at Aitape for the support of land operations and, if General Blamey were to ask for it, Beebe would recommend that No. 79 Wing comprising Nos. 2 and 18 (Mitchell) Squadrons and No. 120 (Kittyhawk) Squadron be moved into New Britain to support land operations there.[2] Bostock also pressed Beebe to permit the transfer of No. 80 Wing (Spitfires) at Darwin to Morotai where it would later come under No. 10 Group. Beebe agreed. In a letter on 28th September Bostock warned Air Commodore Cobby that he would "have to remain patiently at Noemfoor for the time being . . . your staff should make every endeavour to make their contacts with 13th Air Force and I think you will agree from our discussion with Streett that, providing Streett gets a good impression of No. 10 (Operational) Group, which I have no doubt will be the case, he will give you a fair deal and move you forward with his units as circumstances permit. . . . It seems probable that when 5th Air Force gets into the Philippines there will be a general swing to the west and south-west. When this occurs 13th Air Force (and that includes you) will be in a most favourable position to move forward on the left flank."

Streett, said Cobby, "was tickled pink about the arrangement and was full of enthusiasm" that Thirteenth Air Force should take over operational control of No. 10 Group. On 8th October Beebe wrote to Cobby that No. 10 Group would go to Morotai as a group about the 15th November. Cobby said that Streett proposed that No. 10 Group would have com-

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[1] In Advisory War Council Minute 1419, 21 Sep 1944.

[2] Nos. 18 and 120 Sqns were the two NEI units operating with the RAAF.

plete autonomy under the Thirteenth, and be directly responsible to the commanding general. That is, there was to be 13th Bomber Command, 13th Fighter Command and the R.A.A.F. component (either under the name of No. 10 (Operational) Group or First Tactical Air Force). It was also his intention to allot roles and areas to the three components and that Cobby would be given an area and set responsibilities with the title of air task force commander of the area.

Cobby had as his senior air staff officer, Group Captain Gibson, whom he regarded as "a most efficient officer". His senior administrative officer was Group Captain Gerald Packer, whose "ability and industry are of the greatest help". Between these two, he said, "I am well served".[3]

Cobby was, however, very dubious about the command arrangements which he said were "unworkable". In a letter to Bostock he protested about the divided command on a higher level which forced him "to try and serve two masters". But he was also handicapped by a section of G.H.Q. concerning themselves with the details of operations and dispositions of a lower formation. "When that formation is under the operational direction of still another authority, i.e. the Thirteenth Air Force, the position can become Gilbertian. It is impossible to campaign under such conditions. The 1st Tactical Air Force R.A.A.F. is now either administered or directed by R.A.A.F. Headquarters (with Forward Echelon thrown in for luck), R.A.A.F. Command, G.H.Q., and the Commanding General, 13th Air Force. I do not relish the role of the Duke of Plaza Toro," said Cobby.

The change of name of No. 10 Group to First Tactical Air Force, R.A.A.F. took effect on 25th October. The new formation retained command of all wings, squadrons and ancillary units commanded by the group. The new name would indicate more obviously its function as a "mobile striking force". There were other cogent reasons why its name should be changed. For one thing the units under its control were greatly in excess of those normally contained in a group. This was due mainly to the lengthening of lines of communication with the mainland of Australia and with Northern Command. Then again, in American Air Force terminology, "group" meant a force of only three or four squadrons, and, in a predominantly American setting, created the impression that No. 10 (Operational) Group had only so many squadrons under its control.

Unlike other formations of R.A.A.F. Command such as North-Eastern Area and North-Western Area, First Tactical Air Force was not confined to any definite area but would be moved freely wherever required. Bostock urged that First T.A.F. should be kept strictly to its role, i.e., that it should be the fast-moving, hard-striking formation of the R.A.A.F. He warned against the tendency to add static units to its strength, thus reducing its mobility.

Cobby's headquarters and many of the units of the First T.A.F. were located on Noemfoor. Other units, including two airfield construction

[3] Letter, Cobby to Bostock, 31 Oct 1944.

squadrons, were at Morotai while some were at Biak and Aitape and others as far south as Townsville, Queensland.

The force had under its control one "attack" wing, two fighter wings and two airfield construction wings, together with all their medical, stores, base and repair and servicing units.

The "attack" wing which was at Noemfoor was No. 77 whose squadrons were:

No. 77 (Attack) Wing Headquarters (Group Captain Fyfe).
No. 22 Squadron (Squadron Leader Woodman)
No. 30 Squadron (Squadron Leader Sandford)

The fighter wings were Nos. 78 and 81. These had the following squadrons under their control:

No. 81 (Fighter) Wing Headquarters (Group Captain Steege)
No. 76 (Squadron Leader Bowes[4])
No. 77 Squadron (Squadron Leader Stark)
No. 82 Squadron (Squadron Leader Grace)
No. 78 (Fighter) Wing Headquarters (Group Captain Brookes)
No. 75 Squadron (Squadron Leader Lindeman[5])
No. 78 Squadron (Squadron Leader Brydon)
No. 80 Squadron (Squadron Leader Waddy[6])

The two airfield construction wings were:

No. 61 (Airfield Construction) Wing Headquarters
No. 3 Airfield Construction Squadron (Morotai)
No. 14 Airfield Construction Squadron (Morotai)
No. 62 (Airfield Construction) Wing Headquarters
No. 4 Airfield Construction Squadron (Noemfoor)
No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron (Noemfoor)

By October R.A.A.F. Command had 41 R.A.A.F. squadrons on its order of battle. Of these, eight were in First T.A.F., and another three (Nos. 31, 452 and 457 Squadrons) were under orders to leave North-Western Area and join First T.A.F. in its forward bases. Another twelve squadrons including one Liberator squadron and three Spitfire squadrons remained under the control of Air Commodore Charlesworth in North-Western Area.

Northern Command (Air Commodore Lukis), with headquarters at Madang, controlled six squadrons which were engaged in garrison duties in New Guinea. This command would be reinforced by No. 79 Wing from North-Western Area which was to be used in New Britain, while a tactical-reconnaissance squadron (No. 5 Squadron) was under orders to go to Torokina, Bougainville, to operate there with Air Command Northern Solomons, in support of II Australian Corps. The remaining squadrons continued to be engaged from bases on the mainland on anti-submarine patrols off the Australian coast or on minelaying operations.

[4] Sqn Ldr F. L. Bowes, 402846. 453 Sqn; comd 76 Sqn 1944. Probate clerk; of Coogee, NSW; b. Melbourne, 28 Feb 1915.

[5] W Cdr C. W. Lindeman, DFC, 260810. 22 and 76 Sqns; comd 86 and 83 Sqns 1943, 75 Sqn 1944. Chartered accountant; of Point Piper, NSW; b. Strathfield, NSW, 19 Sep 1915.

[6] Gp Capt J. L. Waddy, OBE, DFC, 402685. 250 and 260 Sqns RAF, 4 Sqn SAAF, 92 Sqn RAF; comd 80 Sqn 1944-45. Clerk; of Rose Bay, NSW; b. Sydney, 10 Dec 1914.

CHAPTER 18

# FIRST TACTICAL AIR FORCE AND THE PHILIPPINES

THE Japanese were well aware that the Americans would invade the Philippines and, after June 1944, they began to withdraw outlying forces to that archipelago and to strengthen the garrison with reinforcements from China and Japan.[1] Before October the *Fourth Air Army,* whose headquarters were in the Philippines, received reinforcements totalling 400 aircraft from China, Japan, Singapore, Burma, the Netherlands Indies, and from as far away as Manchuria.[2] Units of *Fourth Air Army* were under orders to operate from Macassar and Menado against the new airfields (Wama and Pitu) under construction at Morotai in order to disrupt the coming operations against the Philippines.

Admiral Toyoda, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet, expected the attack on the Philippines to come in August or September, and after consulting Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo, he was prepared to gamble on using the whole fleet in one big operation against the Americans.[3] There had been an outcry at home, with people asking what the navy was doing during the Allied victories in the Pacific, but the navy was not influenced in its decisions by this public feeling; it was taking a carefully calculated risk. The army was also preparing to fight a decisive battle so as to build up the discipline and morale of the people.[4] The army believed that the retention of the Philippines was necessary to protect the supply line through which came oil, bauxite, tin and rubber. If the supply line was cut, Japan had no hope of winning the war.[5]

The Japanese had come to the conclusion that unless they could soon achieve a decisive victory all would be lost. They must stake everything —the whole of the navy and as much of the army as they could deploy— on one big operation which they named the SHO-GO operation. It might mean a sacrificial slaughter but the risk had to be taken. An Imperial conference held at the Imperial Palace in August 1944 confirmed the SHO-GO plan and gave it political backing. The outline of action approved by the Imperial conference was: "A decisive battle will be prosecuted during the latter part of this year by displaying the fighting power of the nation's armed forces to the maximum and thus the enemy's plans will be crushed . . . in the Pacific Ocean area we will annihilate the main body of the attacking American forces . . . the nation's fighting power,

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[1] Colonel Hattori, staff officer at Imperial GHQ said in an interrogation after the war: "It [Imperial GHQ] still held to the estimate that the American forces would select the Philippines as their next strategic target. It was then estimated that Formosa and the Nansei Islands would follow the Philippines in the choice for subsequent strategic targets; a direct attack upon the Japanese mainland would come after this, while an attack on the Kuriles was considered least possible." (Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo.)

[2] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials,* Vol II, p. 406: Colonel Kaneko.

[3] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations,* Vol II, pp. 316-17.

[4] Lt-Gen Nukada (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

[5] Vice-Admiral Nakazawa (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

especially air power, for the decisive battle will be reinforced speedily. For this purpose all bottlenecks of production will be eliminated. . . . We will maintain neutrality with the Soviet Union and endeavour to improve relations . . . [we will] also attempt the solution of the China problem by initiating well-directed political manoeuvres at Chungking."[6]

While the Japanese correctly anticipated that the Americans would invade the Philippines, they could not predict where in the large archipelago the first assault landing would be made, and the Americans themselves did not make a firm decision until five weeks before the event. As late as 14th September General MacArthur's plan was to carry out intermediate operations in the Talaud Islands and in Sarangani Bay, Mindanao, before the main attack on Leyte. The plan called for a firm foothold to be established on Mindanao Island on 15th November for the support of the main effort against Leyte and Samar which was to be mounted on 20th December.

However, in spite of the Japanese preparations, Admiral Halsey reported evidence of "extreme enemy weakness" at Leyte during strikes by his Third Fleet aircraft sent there to cover the Allied landings at Morotai and Palau. One of his pilots who had been shot down on 13th September and rescued later in the day had talked to some Filipinos who said there were only a handful of Japanese in the whole Leyte area.[7] Halsey had therefore reported to the Joint Chiefs of Staff who were then at Quebec attending the OCTAGON conference that a direct attack on Leyte appeared feasible. This would make possible the scrapping of plans to attack the Talaud Islands, Sarangani Bay and Yap Island. Nimitz had thereupon offered to make available to General MacArthur several divisions earmarked for other objectives. The Joint Chiefs then radioed MacArthur asking his views, but MacArthur was on a cruiser off Morotai and with radio silence being preserved there was no way of getting a reply from him. However, Kenney, although dubious about the accuracy of Halsey's Intelligence report, agreed that a radio message should go to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in MacArthur's name stating that if the XXIV Corps could be made available from the Pacific Ocean Area, he would make a landing on Leyte on 20th October. Within hours, approval for the change was given and staff officers of S.W.P.A. started working out new plans. When MacArthur arrived back from Morotai and was informed, he approved.

On 21st September 1944 General Headquarters issued Operation Instruction No. 70 for the invasion of Leyte. The target date, which was named A-day, was set at 20th October.

The Fifth Air Force was to be the air assault force, with the Thirteenth (including Air Commodore Cobby's No. 10 Group) and R.A.A.F. Command in supporting roles only. The ground assault force was to be entirely American (Krueger's Sixth Army), so that as far as Australian land and air forces were concerned they would have no direct part in

[6] Colonel Hattori (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).
[7] G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, p. 431.

what was hoped would be a triumphant return of the Americans to the Philippines. There was a plan in existence to use an Australian corps (7th and 9th Divisions) in a later operation at Aparri in northern Luzon but this was only to be undertaken if American naval support could not be obtained for the Lingayen Gulf operation. It looked as though, for political reasons, G.H.Q. had adopted the principle of not allowing foreign forces to play a part in the liberation of the Philippine Islands.[8]

The air operations which prepared the invasion of the Philippines covered an enormous area and involved many different air elements of the Allied forces. While Halsey's carrier aircraft pounded Formosa and the Ryukus, the Fifth Air Force and the Thirteenth Air Force (including the Australians of No. 10 Group) hit the southern Philippines and the Netherlands East Indies. Air Commodore Charlesworth's American and Australian squadrons based in the Darwin area were also part of the forces used in this preliminary "softening-up" process. In addition, the Seventh American Air Force attacked the Bonin Islands which were only 600 miles from Japan itself and the Fourteenth American Air Force in China struck at harbours and ships on the China coast.

Meanwhile Halsey's fleet sortied from Ulithi on 6th October "to begin running interference for MacArthur's landing on Leyte".[9] He attacked Formosa on the 12th October and the Japanese, who were alert, counter-attacked the next day. Halsey lost 89 aircraft and the American cruisers *Canberra* and *Houston* were torpedoed but not sunk. The Japanese, including many of their usually well-informed leaders, believed that their navy had at last won a glorious victory. Colonel Hattori testified after the war that even "Imperial Headquarters felt that it had dealt a crushing blow to the enemy fleet". Admiral Ozawa, however, was sceptical of the glowing accounts, and, when Toyoda learned from a naval force he sent to "annihilate Halsey" that Halsey was still very strong, he ordered the force to return.

Charlesworth's squadrons, operating far to the south with the Thirteenth Air Force, blockaded the Banda Sea between Timor and Ceram and attacked installations in the eastern Netherlands East Indies, while Cobby aided the Thirteenth Air Force in its task of neutralising the threat of enemy air attacks on the flank and the supply line to the amphibious landing on Leyte. Cobby concentrated mainly on the Vogelkop Peninsula and the Ambon-Buru Islands. For weeks before the landing on Leyte the Australian squadrons carried out daily attacks with Kittyhawks, Bostons, Liberators and Beaufighters. The intensity of these joint American-Australian air operations can be judged by the fact that in the week before the landing a total of 824 Australian Kittyhawk, Boston and Beaufighter and American Mitchell, Boston, Lightning and Thunderbolt aircraft made attacks on enemy-occupied villages and shipping in the Buru-Ceram Islands area alone, and that for the week ending 27th October

[8] V. Haugland, in *The A.A.F. Against Japan* (1948), wrote that GHQ had adopted this principle; and in fact neither Australian army nor air force units (except non-combat units) went to the Philippines.

[9] W. F. Halsey, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (1947), p. 204.

a total of 572 sorties were carried out against targets in the Vogelkop Peninsula. More than 300 of these sorties were by Australian Kittyhawk aircraft.

During October Bostons and Beaufighters of Group Captain Fyfe's No. 77 Wing sank twenty-four vessels, including transports and barges. In the same month, Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron flew a total of 1,150 hours, more than 850 of which were on operations. On 10th October, four aircraft from this squadron, after completing a mission along the coast of Ceram, ran into heavy weather at an altitude of 8,000 feet when east of Misool Island. The aircraft which were piloted by Flight Lieutenant Morrison,[1] Flight Sergeant Roberts,[2] Flying Officer Andrew[3] and Warrant Officer Bates[4] became separated. Coming through the clouds at 1,000 feet and unable to find the other aircraft Roberts flew to Middleburg (Dutch New Guinea) and reported them missing. Searching aircraft were sent out then and on the following days. On the 12th Andrew was seen by several aircraft from No. 80 Squadron and later in the day was rescued by a Catalina. He could give no information on the other members of the missing flight and despite repeated searches, no trace was found of them. Andrew had lost height and at 2,000 feet, being still in cloud, decided to bail out. He was slightly injured on landing, but fortunately met friendly natives who took care of him until rescued.

On the 13th October, aircraft from seven squadrons of No. 10 Group were out from Kamiri on operations. On this day, six Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron bombed Amahai airfield on Ceram. Seven bombs hit the strip and one dropped on the revetment area. The airstrip had already been thoroughly cratered by previous attacks.

Day after day during October, aircraft from R.A.A.F. squadrons were taking off from Kamiri—usually in flights of four but sometimes in squadrons. No. 82 Squadron which had just begun operations, suffered losses on the 18th October when twelve aircraft in three sections led by Wing Commander Cresswell, Squadron Leader Grace and Flying Officer Lyons[5] went out on operations. One of the pilots (Flying Officer Weymouth[6]) crashed into the sea at the Kai Islands. It looked as though he was hit by enemy ground fire. The aircraft burst into flames on impact with the ground and the pilot was killed. Next, three aircraft returning from a watercraft sweep to Geser Island encountered bad weather and Flying Officer Bellert[7] left the formation near Manokwari and was not seen

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[1] F-Lt A. W. C. Morrison, 416186. 77, 80 and 75 Sqns. Theatrical dancer; of Prospect, SA; b. Exeter, SA, 9 May 1913. Presumed killed in action 10 Oct 1944.

[2] F-O M. A. Roberts, 417428; 75 Sqn. Clerk; of College Park, SA; b. St Peters, SA, 30 Dec 1923.

[3] F-Lt D. E. Andrew, 403301. 22, 12 and 75 Sqns. Accountant; of Canberra; b. Emmaville, NSW, 16 Dec 1916.

[4] W-O J. C. Bates, 409495; 75 Sqn. Wool classer; of Little River, Vic; b. Little River, 28 May 1921. Presumed killed in action 10 Oct 1944.

[5] F-Lt I. A. Lyons, MBE, 400095. 25, 3, 82 and 77 Sqns. Journalist; of Eaglehawk, Vic; b. Bendigo, Vic, 16 Feb 1915.

[6] F-O A. G. Weymouth, 418029. 77 and 82 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Flemington, Vic; b. Echuca, Vic, 9 Aug 1922. Killed in action 18 Oct 1944.

[7] F-O M. A. Bellert, 404001; 82 Sqn. Aircraft mechanic; of Archerfield, Qld; b. Brisbane, 14 Nov 1916. Killed in action 18 Oct 1944.

again. The remaining pilots made their way to base safely. During a bombing mission on Utarom on the same day, Flight Lieutenant Milne[8] of No. 76 Squadron experienced glycol trouble. He baled out 35 miles from his base and was picked up by a Catalina aircraft next day.

On 21st October, while squadrons of No. 81 Wing and Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron carried out sweeps against watercraft and dive-bombed Manokwari and Utarom airfield, the whole of No. 78 Wing dive-bombed the town of Mumi. A total of eighty-one Kittyhawk sorties was carried out against this one target. The bombing covered Mumi and Ransiki bridges and tram lines and anti-aircraft positions, bivouac areas and huts at Waren and Mumi airfields, causing some unobserved damage.

No. 82 Squadron, because most of its equipment and ground staff were still at Townsville, Queensland, awaiting transport to Noemfoor, had a difficult time carrying out the tasks allotted to it. The pilots, in addition to flying the aircraft, had to assist in bombing-up, arming and refuelling their aircraft.

Meanwhile, precipitated by MacArthur's invasion of Leyte, one of the decisive battles of the Pacific war was about to take place. At daybreak on the 20th October, the invasion convoy began to enter Leyte Gulf. For three hours, Admiral Kinkaid's Seventh Fleet battleships, cruisers and destroyers shelled the landing beaches. Only one Japanese aircraft attempted to interfere and it was shot down before it could do any harm. Then the 1st Cavalry and 24th Divisions went ashore south of Tacloban and XXIV Corps at Dulag. There was little opposition because the Japanese had withdrawn inland realising they were incapable of holding the beaches.

As early as the 17th October Admiral Toyoda had heard that the American fleet and transports were approaching Leyte. Next day a conference was called at Imperial General Headquarters and, although it still possessed only "scanty knowledge of the enemy situation", made the decision to set in motion the SHO-GO operation.[9] The Philippines, and Leyte Island in particular, was selected as the battleground over which would be fought what the enemy believed, and believed correctly, was their last opportunity to throw in all their available forces in a decisive engagement.[1]

There were a number of compelling reasons for the decision. In the first place, Imperial G.H.Q. was under the false impression that a crushing blow had just been dealt to Halsey's fleet off Formosa and that therefore the American attack on Leyte which was developing immediately after this blow, would not have such strong naval support.[2] Secondly, the *Fourth Air Army* which had been assigned the leading role in the SHO-GO operation was strong and in good shape. The morale of its pilots was very high and more army aircraft could be rushed to the Philippines

[8] F-Lt K. R. Milne, 407126. 76 and 77 Sqns. Manufacturing chemist; of Brighton, SA; b. 25 Jun 1915.

[9] Colonel Sugita (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).
US Bombing Survey, *Summary Report (Pacific War)*, p. 8.

[1] Colonel Hattori (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

to reinforce them. A battle at Leyte would enable the Japanese fleets to coordinate with army air units in attacks on the American fleet and transports which were to be "annihilated". Surface units could proceed through Philippine waters to the beach-head under the protective umbrella of land-based aircraft.

Only the commander of the *Fourteenth Area Army* (General Yamashita) opposed the plan. He did not want to engage the Americans at Leyte but wait until they advanced on Luzon and engage them there.[3] That was the original plan agreed to in Tokyo and he did not have the ships to transport reinforcements on a large scale, nor the munitions available at Leyte. However, he was overruled by General Terauchi, commander of *Southern Army*. "Suddenly on the 22nd October," said Major Tanaka, a staff officer on the *Fourteenth Area Army* headquarters, "the following *Southern Army* order was received: '(*a*) a heaven-endowed opportunity to smash the arrogant enemy has arrived; (*b*) the *Fourteenth Area Army*, in cooperation with the naval and air forces, will destroy the enemy attacking Leyte Island, using as much military strength as possible'."[4]

For the Imperial Navy the SHO-GO operation was to be the supreme naval effort of the war. The navy had a bold and imaginative plan which involved bringing fleets from three points to converge on the American transports in Leyte Gulf. Toyoda ordered Admiral Kurita's *Second Fleet* to move from Singapore-Lingga. The *Fifth Fleet* would sortie from the Pescadores to reinforce Kurita and Admiral Ozawa's *Third Fleet* was to move down from Japan proper, in an attempt to decoy Halsey away from Leyte while Kurita went in for the kill against shipping off-shore. The three fleets would coordinate for a devastating attack on 25th October. At Brunei Bay on the 22nd October, Kurita's captains had a last conference, drank a few toasts to the Emperor, and by 10 a.m. were under way for Leyte Gulf. The die was cast.

The prize the Japanese fleet sought was the 600-odd vessels in Leyte Gulf and, to help clear the seas for the approach of the main fleet, Vice-Admiral Fukudome had authorised the first *Kamikaze* (suicide aircraft) attacks.[5] On 21st October, three picked out H.M.A.S. *Australia* as a target. Two were shot down by anti-aircraft fire but a third crashed on the bridge, killing Captain Dechaineux,[6] its commander.

On the morning of the 24th, 80 to 100 aircraft approached from the north-westward, but only 20 or 30 were able to penetrate to the transport area. Intelligence reports of the approach of Japanese fleet units were coming in. Sightings of naval vessels had been reported off Mindoro, off

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[3] Lt-Gen Nukada (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

[4] Major Tanaka (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

[5] *Kamikaze*, meaning "Divine Wind", was the name given to a typhoon which swept down and scattered the invasion fleet of the Genghis Khan in the thirteenth century, and thus saved Japan from imminent destruction. When the necessity again arose *Kamikaze* was quickly adapted in a modern context to inspire Japanese pilots to sacrifice themselves in suicide attacks against aircraft carriers and other shipping at Leyte.

[6] Capt E. F. V. Dechaineux, DSC; RAN. Comd HMS's *Vivacious*, 1940, *Eglinton*, 1940, HMAS's *Warramunga*, 1942-44, *Australia*, 1944. Of Moonah, Tas; b. Launceston, Tas, 3 Oct 1902. Killed in action 21 Oct 1944.

Borneo, and off Cape Engano to the north. On the 24th Halsey had radioed Kinkaid that he was heading north with three carrier groups to deal with Ozawa's fleet. Kinkaid was relying on Halsey to take care of the Japanese fleet (Kurita) which was coming through the central Philippines along San Bernardino Strait, while he moved his whole force south to engage the Japanese *Second Fleet* which was coming through Surigao Strait between Leyte and Mindanao. Kinkaid practically wiped out this southern force early on the 25th October, but the Japanese strategy had succeeded in drawing Halsey to the north while Kurita's central force, consisting of four battleships, seven heavy cruisers and between twelve and fifteen destroyers penetrated to Leyte Gulf and engaged twelve escort carriers off the beach-head.[7]

Before arriving off Leyte, Kurita had lost the heavy cruisers *Maya* and *Atago* to American submarines, and the huge 63,000-ton battleship *Musashi,* which had 16-inch guns, was sunk by Halsey's carrier pilots on 24th October. On the 25th Admiral Kinkaid's twelve light carriers off Leyte withdrew southwards under fire from Kurita's force. "Disaster suddenly stared us in the face," wrote Kenney.[8] But the Japanese broadsides were inaccurate. They sank one of the carriers, the *Gambier Bay,* and severely damaged others which Japanese *Kamikaze* pilots finished off later. However, Kinkaid had radioed Halsey and help was on the way. The Japanese central fleet, although within sight of victory, then withdrew. Halsey's carrier planes meanwhile had destroyed all four Japanese aircraft carriers in the northern group—the *Zuikaku, Chiyoda, Zuiho* and *Chitose* —for the loss of one American carrier, the *Princeton.*[9] Altogether this big naval action cost the Japanese three battleships, four aircraft carriers, six heavy cruisers, five light cruisers and ten destroyers. For these catastrophic losses the Imperial Japanese Navy failed to gain any worthwhile objectives and the Combined Fleet ceased to exist as an organised force. The Japanese were now no longer a great power, and they could not stop the advance of the huge American amphibious forces.

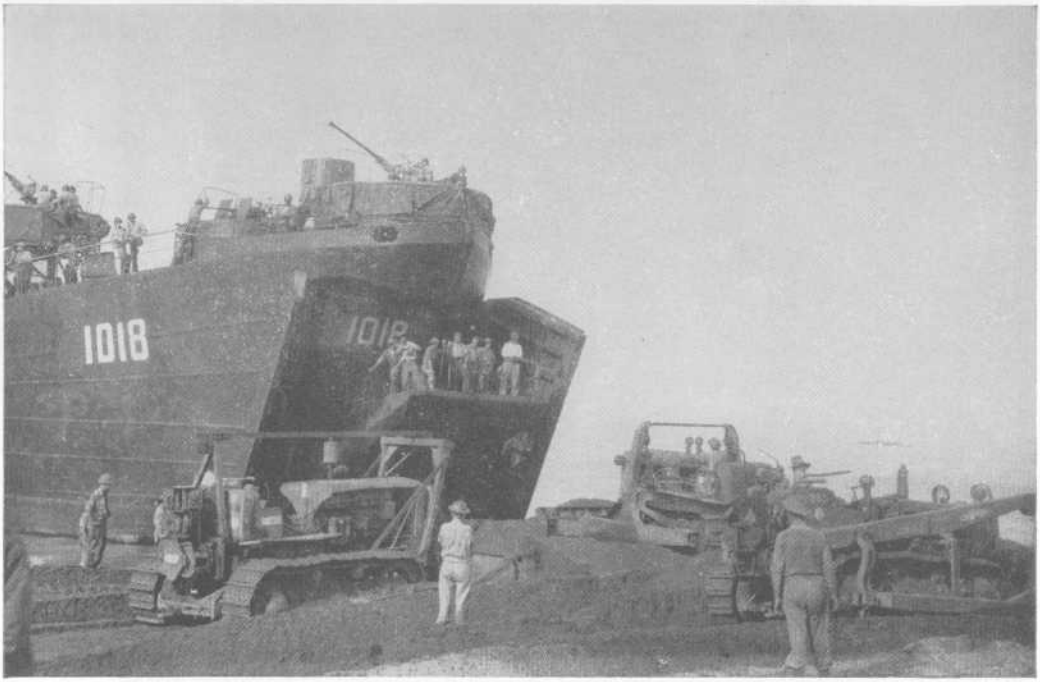
While the Battle of Leyte Gulf proceeded, General Yamashita was able to land reinforcements at Ormoc on the west side of Leyte. The Japanese soldiers committed were an *élite* group drawn from the *Fourteenth Area Army* and bitter fighting ensued on Leyte.

On 27th October airfield construction had proceeded far enough for Lightnings of No. 49 Group to come forward from Morotai. The Fifth Air Force and the carrier aircraft hit the enemy convoys, interrupting the flow of reinforcements, hundreds of whom were drowned. The Japanese *Fourth Air Army* still had some 500 aircraft, but the quality of the pilots and their air force organisation was falling off. In part this was due to the Japanese practice of leaving trained units at the front until they were completely destroyed or cut off. This meant that training, already

[7] Halsey was later criticised for allowing himself to be decoyed by Ozawa and thus exposing the shipping off Leyte to Kurita's force.

[8] Kenney, p. 458.

[9] Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, *Japanese Naval and Merchant Shipping Losses During World War II by All Causes* (1947), p. 16.



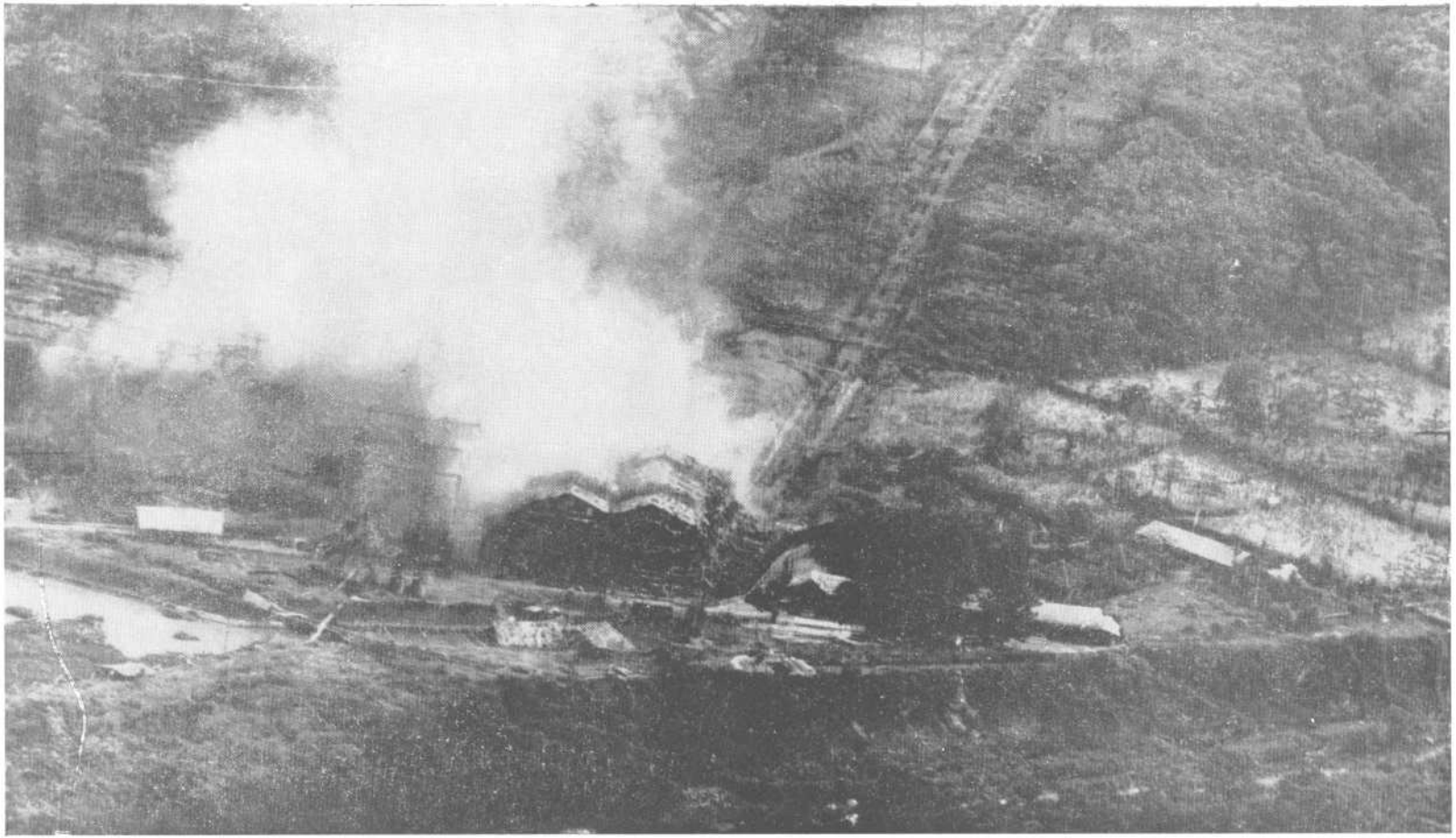

*(R.A.A.F.)*

No. 3 Airfield Construction Squadron at the Mindoro landing on 15th December 1944. Men of the unit are using three bulldozers to build a ramp from the beach to the open bows of an LST.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Men of No. 3 Airfield Construction Squadron and two United States infantrymen at Mindoro. The Australians are left to right: L.A.C's F. Watts and J. Webster, and Sgt J. Smith.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

On 5th and 8th February 1945, Liberators of No. 24 Squadron operating over 1,000 miles from their base in Western Australia bombed the Kali Konto hydro-electric power station, 50 miles south-west of Surabaya, which supplies electric power to the whole of east Java. The photograph taken during the raid of the 8th February shows the elaborate camouflage with which the Japanese tried to disguise the plant.

reduced in effectiveness by a lack of petrol, did not benefit from the practical experience of the combat aircrews.

From Morotai Generals Whitehead and Streett were sending fighters and bombers over the Philippines to prevent as far as possible the enemy's *Fourth Air Army* from hitting at the beach-head at Leyte. The Japanese air attacks at Leyte were getting results. One night they destroyed all but twenty of P-38's there. The wrecks of these aircraft were pushed into the water and reinforcements rushed up from Morotai. The Japanese kept reinforcing the *Fourth Air Army* in spite of constant losses. Reinforcements were coming in from as far afield as the Netherlands East Indies, leaving a huge area without fighter protection. As a result, Kenney's airmen ranged from Morotai to Java and from New Guinea to Borneo at will, hitting airfields, communications and dumps. The numbers of aircraft operating over these areas each day was between 200 and 400 and they rarely struck fighter opposition. Air Commodore Cobby's First Tactical Air Force played a considerable part in these operations, flying hundreds of sorties each week. On 22nd October, six Bostons of No. 22 Squadron bombed Tulehu on Ambon Island and on the 29th they pattern-bombed Suli village. Four Australian aircrew were killed this day. A Beaufighter piloted by Squadron Leader Wallace[1] with Flying Officer Hider[2] as navigator crashed into the sea near Ambon and burst into flames on impact. On the same day twelve aircraft from No. 76 Squadron were flying in ordinary formation during practice interceptions with American Thunderbolt aircraft, the commander of which had asked No. 76 Squadron to take part in "dog fights" for the purpose of helping new pilots. The Thunderbolts were making a mock rear attack and the Kittyhawks were ordered to turn about, but one of them turned the wrong way and collided with another. One aircraft fell to pieces in the air and the other went straight into the water.

In operations during October No. 78 Wing, which included Nos. 75, 78 and 80 Squadrons, lost three aircraft from anti-aircraft fire; in addition two were damaged and four destroyed from other causes. One pilot was killed, four missing and two were rescued. Strenuous efforts were made by the wing to attack units of *II Japanese Army* based at Manokwari. In spite of their efforts, however, they met with little success because of the density of the bush along waterways and trails. The number of sorties flown by this wing showed a decline in October, because No. 81 Wing, which was becoming established at Noemfoor, was allotted some of No. 78 Wing's duties. The nearer targets were allotted to No. 81 and the more remote ones to No. 78, which undertook sweeps to the east coast of Ambon, the Haruku and Ceram Straits and the south coast of Ceram as far west as Piru township. On 31st October forty Kittyhawks from Nos. 78 and 81 Wings attacked villages and bivouac areas on the

[1] Sqn Ldr R. H. Wallace, 586. 21, 5 and 30 Sqns. Regular air force offr; of Largs Bay, SA; b. Semaphore, SA, 12 Jan 1919. Killed in action 29 Oct 1944.

[2] F-O R. H. Hider, 433672; 30 Sqn. School teacher; of Bexley, NSW; b. Camden, NSW, 14 Dec 1921. Killed in action 29 Oct 1944.

Vogelkop Peninsula and searched for shipping around the coast. Fires were caused during an attack on Mumi, but little shipping was sighted.

Although they were excluded from direct part in the Philippines operations during the battle for Leyte Island, First Tactical Air Force indirectly aided the over-all operations by helping to keep some 40,000 enemy troops immobilised in Halmahera, Celebes and Dutch New Guinea. General Arnold gave qualified praise to these operations in his second report to the Secretary of War: "To the extent that these operations [of the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces and the R.A.A.F.] against the Mindanao-Halmahera-Northwest Celebes-Ceram-Buru area neutralised the threat of enemy air attacks on the flank and the supply line of our amphibious landing on Leyte, they made that landing possible. Continual pounding of the enemy in Java and Borneo and of his important airdromes and concentration centres in the entire region further helped our amphibious operations on Leyte."

General Streett, by a "Letter of Instruction" directed First T.A.F. on 3rd November as follows:

Prepare to move units forward to Morotai as directed.

Base one fighter squadron at Mokmer aerodrome for the defence of Biak. The squadron to operate under the operational control of the Commanding General, Fifth Air Force.

Conduct daily sweeps for enemy shipping in the Vogelkop-Ceram-Kai Islands areas.

Continue to attack and neutralise vital installations in the Vogelkop-Eastern Ceram-Kai Islands areas.

Utilising Havocs [Boston aircraft] and Beaufighters, sweep Halmahera and northern Celebes for enemy shipping and vital installations.

Operations in the Vogelkop Peninsula area were severely restricted by bad weather during the first week in November. As a result few First T.A.F. aircraft could operate and some pilots failed to reach their targets. On 2nd November, because of the weather, only 12 Kittyhawks took part in the bombing and strafing of enemy-occupied villages. Again, on the 4th, 28 aircraft took off to bomb targets. Only 11 completed their missions and the others had to return to Kamiri without having reached their assigned targets. After several days' inactivity attacks were resumed on the Vogelkop area. A heavily loaded barge was destroyed and three barges, two schooners and a motor-launch were damaged, and direct hits were scored on the Utarom airfield on 11th November. Among the attacking pilots were three Dutchmen of No. 120 (Netherlands East Indies) Squadron who had come up from Merauke (Dutch New Guinea) to be temporarily attached to Australian Kittyhawk squadrons at Noemfoor. On the 13th November 28 R.A.A.F. Kittyhawks again bombed the Utarom airstrip, rendering it unserviceable. On the 14th attacks were made on various targets by 27 Kittyhawks, the heaviest being a mission by 12 to Doom Island. All bombs in the Doom Island strike landed in the stores and bivouac area and a fire was started.

The aircraft and pilots of No. 75 Squadron together with a nucleus of ground crews had been transferred to Biak on 2nd November where they operated from Mokmer airfield. The Americans had big concentrations of supplies and equipment at Biak, and it was essential that it should have protection from enemy raiders which might be expected to appear during the crucial operations in the Philippines. At Biak the squadron came under the control of the Fifth Air Force. However, there were no raids.

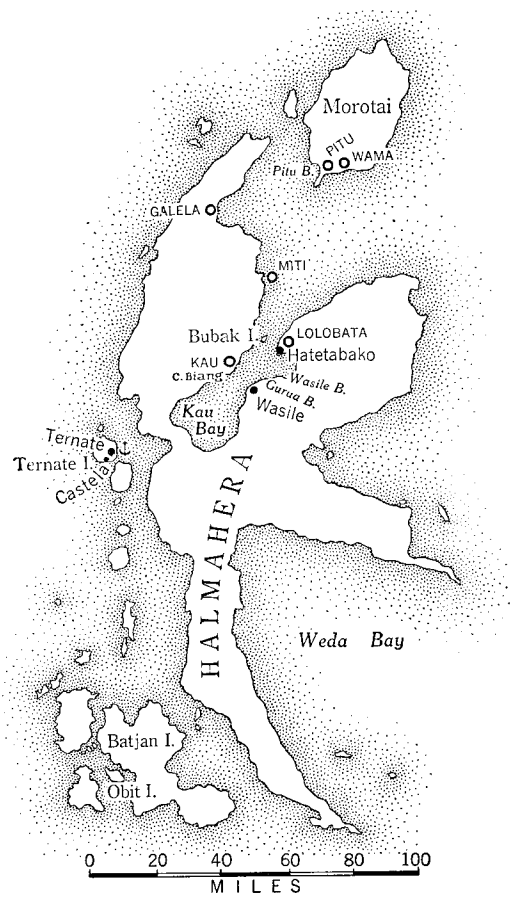
Cobby established a command at Morotai on 25th October. When First T.A.F. moved to Morotai in strength it was to take over garrison duty for the island which at this time was being carried out by the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces. The Fifth was now in the process of moving to the Philippines and the Thirteenth was to follow at a later date. On 6th November, Cobby warned Nos. 22 and 30 Squadrons to move to Morotai within seventy-two hours. They were to be used from Morotai against Halmahera and northern Celebes.

Concentrated efforts were made during the month to organise First T.A.F. at Morotai, but at every turn the commander ran into the difficulty of providing transport. Overriding priority on shipping and air transport had been given to the Philippines operations and the situation had been worsened by the fact that the Leyte operation had been brought forward two months and could not therefore take advantage of the additional shipping that would have arrived in time for the original date set for the Leyte operation.

Advanced detachments of No. 77 Wing, with Nos. 22 and 30 Squadrons, arrived at Morotai on the 15th November, where they came under the command of Group Captain Brookes, temporarily in command of Advanced Headquarters, First T.A.F. On the following day twenty-one aircraft of No. 30 Squadron took off from Noemfoor and arrived at Morotai the same day. One Beaufighter crashed on take-off at the side of Kamiri airfield and burst into flames. The pilot could not be reached because of the intense heat, but rescuers pulled the navigator out and he was rushed to a medical clearing station where, however, he died two hours later. Two passengers in the aircraft crawled through a hole and escaped. Another Beaufighter blew a tyre on landing at Wama, causing the aircraft to ground loop and strike a bank at the side of the strip. It was irreparably damaged but the crew escaped injury.

On the 17th sixteen Bostons of No. 22 Squadron arrived at Morotai, and the following day Beaufighters and Bostons took off from Wama for the first time on strikes against airfields, watercraft and enemy installations in the northern Celebes. Led by Squadron Leader Woodman, Eight Bostons attacked the Sidate airfield in north-east Celebes, dropping 500-lb bombs in the revetment areas. The Bostons also attacked coastal schooners, one of which was "probably destroyed". The Beaufighter aircraft had Gorontalo airfield as a target but could not find it, and made strafing attacks on buildings and watercraft as an alternative. Both the Bostons and Beaufighters encountered anti-aircraft fire.

From late October through November the Japanese Army Air Force's *7th Air Division,* operating through Macassar in Celebes had been carrying out frequent night raids on Morotai, using flights usually of three bombers and three fighters.[3] Their mission was to disrupt Allied movements at the rear during the SHO-GO operation, the land and air phases of which were now in full swing in the Philippines. Three Betty bombers even got as far as Rabaul and carried out a surprise daylight raid on Momote in the Admiralties, causing slight damage. Australian Spitfires of No. 79 Squadron were scrambled to intercept but did not see the raiders. On the same day eight bombs were dropped on Morotai, destroying one bomber. One of the raiders, a Nick, was shot down. To counter the enemy raids the R.A.A.F. and the Thirteenth Air Force carried out heavy raids on enemy airfields within range. These operations were supplemented by further missions carried out by American and Australian bombers from the Darwin area.




Halmahera Island, which lies more or less midway between New Guinea and Morotai, received considerable attention from the Thirteenth Air Force and First T.A.F. during November. Ninety-two of the Thirteenth's aircraft bombed Kau, Galela and Miti airfields on the 7th. Halmahera was a strongly-held Japanese area. Lolobata, Galela, Kau and Miti were the principal enemy personnel and supply concentrations on the island which the Japanese had fortified because they believed it would be invaded. Its neutralisation was essential to the safety of Allied lines of communication to Morotai.

On the 17th November eight Kittyhawks (four each from Nos. 78 and 80 Squadrons) were ordered to carry out a watercraft sweep in Kau Bay,

[3] Major Yamaguchi (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

but they reported seeing only one 25-foot schooner which they strafed and hit. Australian Bostons and Beaufighters operating from Morotai again attacked Celebes targets on the 20th November. Eight of the Bostons attacked Tanamon airfield leaving it unserviceable. Buildings were then strafed, six of them being set on fire. Four Beaufighters took off at noon to attack shipping from Cape Samia to Tanamon. No shipping being sighted, they made rocket attacks on buildings at Tanamon. Another four from the same squadron damaged two barges in a strafing sweep in the Menado area.

On the 22nd November, for the first time in the war, Australian aircraft struck as far north as the Philippines. Operating from Wama, eight Bostons attacked the Bunuwan harbour area north of Davao, Mindanao Island. After the attack, the crews reported fires to 1,500 feet. Light anti-aircraft fire holed one of the Bostons. On the same day eight Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Thompson,[4] on armed reconnaissance, strafed coastal targets in Davao Gulf, exploding and destroying one barge and probably destroying another. Heavy attacks were made at the same time over the Philippines by 242 American Liberators, 53 Mitchells, 121 Lightnings and 101 Thunderbolts of the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces.

All the Australian aircraft returned safely from the Philippines foray, but that same night (22nd-23rd November) a damaging blow was struck at the operational strength of First T.A.F. at Morotai by Japanese bombers which attacked the Pitu and Wama airfields. One of the nine enemy aircraft which attacked was shot down but 15 Allied aircraft were destroyed on the ground and 29 damaged. The Pitu runway was cratered, three men being killed and eight wounded. Included in the aircraft destroyed were nine Bostons of No. 22 Squadron. In spite of the fact that the Bostons were loaded with 500-lb bombs ready for operations, two Australian ground staff men courageously attempted to put out fires started during the raid.

Two nights later more enemy raiders dropped bombs on Pitu, destroying two Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron and damaging another ten. Three American aircraft were also destroyed.

Morotai was full of aircraft and the congestion on the strips was at least partly responsible for the losses during the raids. There were not enough engineers operating on the island to increase the dispersal facilities. Similar troubles were being experienced at Leyte. The light Filipino roads were breaking down under heavy traffic and engineers had to be taken off airfield construction to keep the roads open.

Although the Japanese achieved some local tactical success in their raids on Morotai, it was much too small an effort to neutralise Morotai effectively. However, it did reduce considerably the operational strength of First T.A.F. No. 22 Squadron, for example, had few serviceable aircraft left after the raids and Cobby ordered it to withdraw to Noemfoor where

[4] W Cdr C. H. C. Thompson, AFC, 290351. Comd 30 Sqn 1944-45; 77 Wing 1945. Clerk; of Temora, NSW; b. 8 Dec 1914.

it was to be rearmed and its crews retrained with Beaufighter aircraft. This squadron was the only unit in the R.A.A.F. armed with Boston aircraft and the crews regretted changing over to Beaufighters, especially as they regarded the Bostons as a reliable aircraft with first-class handling qualities and performance. It was necessary to convert the squadron to Beaufighters, however, because there were not sufficient replacements of Boston aircraft to maintain the squadron in action. Moreover, from the point of view of supply, the change would be advantageous because it would reduce the number of different types of aircraft in First T.A.F. All three units assigned to No. 77 Wing would now be Beaufighter squadrons.

To counter the enemy's night raids on Morotai, the Allied Air Forces during November and December struck at all the airfields within reach which could be used by the enemy as bases for their attacks. At the end of November First T.A.F. Kittyhawk aircraft were striking heavily at the enemy on Halmahera. Bostons (until withdrawn to Noemfoor) and Beaufighters continued to attack northern Celebes and Halmahera, while southern Celebes was under air bombardment by heavy units of North-Western Area from Darwin. The Kittyhawk wings of First T.A.F., which had previously given most of their attention to the Vogelkop Peninsula, were now allotted additional work against targets on Halmahera. Because of the distance involved, the Kittyhawks staged in either at Middleburg or Morotai where they topped up with fuel.

The day after the damaging raid of 22nd November, eleven Kittyhawks of No. 82 Squadron dive-bombed Lolobata and Hatetabako airfields on Halmahera and twelve from No. 77 Squadron dive-bombed airfields at Galela, also on Halmahera. Bombs dropped by this latter mission exploded along the entire length of No. 2 Airstrip, leaving it unserviceable. Flight Sergeant Palme[5] and Sergeant Smithwick[6] were missing after the attacks on Galela. Palme was shot down in the Galela town area and Smithwick crashed into the sea fifteen miles east of the airfield. Two other aircraft were holed by anti-aircraft fire during this attack. Next day twenty-two Australian Kittyhawks attacked the same targets again. The pilots reported direct hits and noted evidence of enemy aircraft having been at the airfields.

These attacks on Halmahera continued throughout November, the Beaufighters and Bostons joining in on a reduced scale of effort when they had recovered from the losses suffered from the enemy raids on Morotai. Four Bostons landed bombs on the Hatetabako airfield on 29th November and on the same day forty-four Kittyhawks attacked this airfield as well as Galela. Both strips were left unserviceable.

Aircraft of No. 75 Squadron returned on 29th November from Biak to Noemfoor where the aircraft were serviced and bombed up ready for

[5] F-Sgt B. A. Palme, 432562; 77 Sqn. Student; of Parramatta, NSW; b. Annandale, NSW, 16 Oct 1924. Killed in action 23 Nov 1944.

[6] Sgt K. R. Smithwick, 431425; 77 Sqn. Cooper; of Preston, Vic; b. Northcote, Vic, 15 Jun 1925. Killed in action 23 Nov 1944.

operations. The following day twenty-one Kittyhawks led by Squadron Leader Kimpton[7] dive-bombed and strafed Hatetabako airfield. After attacking this airfield the squadron continued on to Morotai to be refuelled and bombed-up. They then attacked the same target on the return journey to Noemfoor Island via Middleburg. They reported that the Lolobata airfield was definitely unserviceable, with twenty craters visible on the runway and dispersal areas.

In December the onslaught on Halmahera continued. Not only First T.A.F. but the Thirteenth Air Force continued to send hundreds of sorties against this target. Again staging through Morotai, forty-seven Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing bombed Hatetabako, Miti and Galela on 1st December. The attacks took place in conjunction with concurrent attacks on the same targets by American Mitchells, Lightnings and Liberators. The Japanese were making a big effort to keep the Halmahera airfields open in spite of the terrific hammering. On 4th December, reconnaissance aircraft of Far Eastern Air Force found that No. 1 strip at Galela was serviceable. Fresh dirt had been dumped into the bomb craters on the runway which was smooth for its entire length. Anti-aircraft weapons kept up a hot fire on the raiding aircraft. Even small arms were used and aircraft were hit on practically every low-flying mission. To avoid damage, First T.A.F. squadrons adopted coordinated bombing attacks followed by low-level strafing runs from different directions simultaneously. It was found that these methods reduced the damage from ground fire.

On 9th and 10th December a total of ninety-one Australian Kittyhawks attacked Galela, Miti and Hatetabako airfields, again rendering them all unserviceable. In spite of the constant pounding of enemy airfields, however, some Japanese aircraft managed to stage in occasionally and attack Morotai.

In October there had been no shortage of targets for the squadrons operating from the Northern Territory. Indirect support for the Leyte operations proceeded with little incident. Before the landing, Liberators from No. 380 Group and No. 24 Squadron R.A.A.F. bombed targets at Ambon and in Celebes. No. 24 Squadron sent six Liberators, led by Squadron Leader Manning, to Pare Pare in southern Celebes where they bombed shipyards. All except Flying Officer Carrigan bombed the target but because of clouds results could not be determined; the bomb-bay doors of Carrigan's aircraft would not open and the flight commander directed him to drop his bombs at Atambua (Timor) on the return flight. Six more Liberators from this squadron joined squadrons of No. 380 Group in bombing Ambesia airfield in Celebes on 25th October.

Charlesworth was sending out frequent strikes against enemy shipyards in Celebes. The enemy, desperately short of shipping, was busy building wooden vessels. After the landing in the Philippine Islands, the passage of enemy shipping through the South China Sea, already subject to inter-

[7] Sqn Ldr R. C. McD. Kimpton, DFC, 250730. 21, 5 and 77 Sqns; comd 75 Sqn 1944-45. Flour miller; of Toorak, Vic; b. Melbourne, 21 Sep 1916.

diction by submarines, would be still further constricted by land-based aircraft operating from Leyte. In view of this it was considered that the best targets remaining in the Netherlands East Indies were shipbuilding facilities and oil installations. The yards in southern Celebes having been destroyed, Bostock suggested that Charlesworth should now turn his attention to the enemy ships themselves. "An important tactical result of this strategy," he wrote, "may well be to embarrass the enemy when he endeavours to reinforce areas in the Netherlands East Indies subsequently attacked by Allied ground forces."

No. 79 Wing, now reinforced by the return to the area of No. 13 Squadron, newly-equipped with Ventura aircraft, helped to maintain heavy pressure on enemy shipping. In October Nos. 2 and 18 Squadrons destroyed or damaged twenty-two freighter-barges. No. 2 Squadron also attacked Saumlaki, where the wharves were repeatedly hit by bombs. Throughout October and into November Charlesworth sent Liberators, Mitchells and Beaufighters against shipping targets.

Mitchells of Nos. 2 and 18 Squadrons obtained excellent results from shipping sweeps among the islands of the Flores-Timor group in November. They sank or damaged no fewer than 32 vessels, including four small freighters. The Japanese, who in this period were short of vessels, were using small native craft, and because of this, after due warning to the natives, the Mitchells began attacks on two-masted luggers.

On 6th November four Mitchells from No. 2 Squadron accompanied by twelve from No. 18 Squadron carried out a coordinated attack on a vessel at Waingapu, Sumba Island. Two motor vessels had been reported in the harbour by reconnaissance aircraft. No. 2 Squadron was ordered to provide four Mitchells to attack the target, and they were to stage through the newly-prepared Truscott airfield in Western Australia. The twelve Dutch Mitchells led by Major Boot were to attack Waingapu town and anti-aircraft positions from medium altitude to divert the attention of the anti-aircraft gunners as the Australian Mitchells swept in low to attack the ships.

The four Mitchell captains of No. 2 Squadron selected for the operation were Flight Lieutenants Norriss[8] and Carter,[9] Flying Officer Thompson[1] and Warrant Officer Leach.[2] At Truscott airfield, Norriss and Boot conferred and it was decided that Norriss would use his discretion about a mast-height attack, depending on the size of the target. When south of Cape Melangu, No. 18 Squadron reported seeing "a 1,000-ton motor vessel moving out from the wharf at Waingapu". While No. 18 Squadron bombed the anti-aircraft positions in the town, Norriss went in with his Mitchells at mast height, straddling the vessel, which was estimated to be of 300

[8] Sqn Ldr P. J. Norriss, 406551; 2 Sqn. Mining plant operator; of Perth, WA; b. Perth, 27 May 1916.

[9] F-Lt W. A. Carter, 415098; 2 Sqn. School teacher; of Claremont, WA; b. Henley Beach, SA, 11 Nov 1915.

[1] F-Lt W. F. E. Thompson, 406741. 35 and 2 Sqns. Chemist; of Fremantle, WA; b. Kalgoorlie, WA, 19 Apr 1915. Killed in action 20 Dec 1944.

[2] F-O J. B. Leach, 410603. 67 and 2 Sqns. Process engraver; of Ballarat, Vic; b. Ballarat, 13 Jun 1923.

tons. The last aircraft over the target reported that the ship was enveloped in smoke and it was considered that heavy damage had resulted. Norriss' aircraft was holed in the bomb-aimer's compartment. The vessel sunk was *Special Submarine Chaser No. 118* of the Japanese Navy and Japanese records after the war show that it was sunk during this attack, although at the time the Australians did not know that it had sunk and only claimed it as "severely damaged".[3] The Dutch crews of No. 18 Squadron scored successes against Japanese shipping on 25th and 29th November, when they sank two small merchant vessels off the north coast of Timor. On both occasions they saw Japanese jump from the decks of the stricken vessels into the water.

The assault by North-Western Area aircraft on enemy shipping continued in December with considerable success. The major part of No. 79 Wing's effort went into attacks on shipping. The Wing claimed the destruction of four freighters and a total of 25 smaller vessels. Liberators of No. 24 Squadron also attacked shipping. They had some success on 2nd December when they found a small enemy convoy in Macassar Strait. The first bomb dropped scored a direct hit on a small freighter and it sank in one minute. Damage was also caused to another freighter and a fuel barge.

The assault on shipping in December and the results achieved are illustrated by a series of sweeps along the Sumba-Sawu-Roti Islands area from the 15th to 20th December. Four Mitchells from No. 18 Squadron attacked a 400-ton vessel with four motor vehicles on its deck near Waingapu, forcing it into shallow water. Later, four Mitchells from No. 2 Squadron destroyed the vessel by mast-height bombing and strafing. On the 16th December, a 70-ton lugger was destroyed by the Dutch pilots off Sawu. On the 18th, near Roti Island, Flying Officer Coward[4] and his crew, of No. 2 Squadron, scored a direct hit on a 150-ton vessel which blew up. On the 20th the Dutch pilots sank a 900-ton vessel, the *Shoeki Maru* off the Schildpad Islands in the Banda Sea. A small convoy, travelling at 8 knots and comprising two motor vessels with an escorting torpedo boat had been sighted by a reconnaissance aircraft. No. 18 Squadron was ordered to attack it and they sent four Mitchells. Three of these found the convoy and shadowed it. The torpedo boat tried to get ahead of the larger vessel (*Shoeki Maru*) to cover it, while the heavily-armed smaller vessel remained at the rear. The three Mitchells, diving from 1,200 feet to mast height, attacked and scored direct hits. The bridge disappeared and the vessel caught fire. The Mitchells left it on fire from stem to stern and with the stern rising in the water. Many Japanese jumped into the water to escape the flames before the vessel sank.

In conjunction with the Thirteenth Air Force, Charlesworth was called on late in November and during December to prevent the enemy using airfields in Celebes from which the Japanese *7th Air Division* was bomb-

[3] The Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee report states, however, that the weight of this vessel was estimated at only 100 tons.

[4] F-Lt W. G. Coward, 411005; 2 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Gordon, NSW; b. Sydney, 23 Sep 1919.

ing Morotai. There were some thirty-six airfields in clusters of four or five from which the Japanese could stage these attacks and it was found impossible to keep them all unserviceable by bombing. When North-Western Area Liberators bombed Kendari, the enemy would stage through Ambesia. Ambesia would then be bombed and the enemy would move back. Finally Charlesworth began sending out night-harassing raids. A Liberator staged over the Kendari airfields for five nights, dropping about 600 empty beer bottles (the sound of which is most menacing until they hit) and, at intervals, 120-lb demolition bombs. The Liberators also cratered runways and destroyed barracks areas at Ambesia, Kendari, Boro Boro and Malimpung airfields, where several grounded aircraft were believed destroyed. By the end of December the enemy had ceased sending aircraft to attack Morotai.

## CHAPTER 19

# BOUGAINVILLE AND NEW BRITAIN

THE Japanese first landed on Bougainville during late March 1942. At that time they had intended to use it merely as an intermediate base between Rabaul and Guadalcanal. When Guadalcanal fell, however, they began to mould Bougainville into a strongly held area which would provide an outer defence to the main South Pacific base of Rabaul. By October 1942 the *XVII Japanese Army* had 46,000 men on Bougainville and the Japanese Navy 20,000.

The landing by Admiral Halsey's forces at Torokina, in Empress Augusta Bay, in November 1943, had been a great surprise to the enemy. Lieut-General Kanda, commander of the *6th Division,* regarded as one of the most rugged divisions in the Japanese Army, had inspected the area only two weeks before and had come to the conclusion that it was unsuitable for an invasion. There was only a company of the *6th Division* in the area when American marines landed and resistance was necessarily slight. Kanda organised a hurried counter-attack which failed, and General Hyakutake, commander of the *XVII Army,* thereupon ordered Kanda to withdraw and prepare for a large-scale counter-blow. This offensive had been launched on 8th March 1944, when the whole of the *6th Division* had attacked in three columns, Kanda, to encourage his troops, declaring: "There can be no rest until our bastard foes are battered and bowed in shame. . . ." The attackers penetrated the perimeter at some points, but they were beaten back by tanks and artillery.

By August 1944 it had become obvious to the Japanese that the Americans did not intend to extend their gains beyond the Torokina perimeter and the tension on the enemy side eased. The Japanese themselves did not plan any further offensives and a state of peaceful "colonisation" existed in Bougainville.

However, they were not to be left in peace for long. The planned redeployment of Allied forces in the middle of 1944 required that the XIV American Corps should move out of Torokina and the II Australian Corps should take its place. At a conference with his subordinates on 11th August, General Blamey had said that the Australians might undertake the elimination of the Japanese forces in Bougainville. The operations would be supported by the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the 1st Marine Air Wing, and by an army-cooperation wing of the Royal Australian Air Force.[1]

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[1] An army-cooperation wing was essentially non-offensive in character. As its name implies, it worked with army forces providing them with a number of essential services, namely: tactical reconnaissance, artillery reconnaissance, supply by air to troops, anti-malarial spraying, and the "lead-in" of attacking squadrons. It was never allowed to carry out offensive operations, but it was permitted to attack "targets of opportunity". Each army-cooperation wing comprised the following tactical units: (1) Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron; (2) Local Air Supply Unit; (3) Air Observation Post Flight.

The New Zealand Air Task force under Group Captain Roberts,[2] which had been passed to General MacArthur's command when the South Pacific Area was dissolved, was assigned to support the Australian Army in the Northern Solomons. Since the New Zealanders had no army-cooperation organisation, the R.A.A.F. was to provide an army-cooperation wing. The wing assigned was No. 84, formed at Cairns, Queensland, in September under the command of Group Captain Hely.[3] It took over No. 5 Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, which had been stationed at Mareeba for some time, and, in addition, No. 10 Communication Unit, No. 17 Air Observation Post Flight and No. 39 Operational Base Unit. An advanced party of No. 84 Wing arrived at Torokina on 8th October and made arrangements for the wing to occupy a camp site formerly occupied by Marine Air Group 24.

It was decided to send the air echelon of No. 5 Squadron to Torokina ahead of the ground echelon. By early November this air echelon, consisting of eighteen Boomerangs and four Wirraways, had arrived at Piva North airfield, Torokina, and the squadron carried out its first operation, a tactical reconnaissance of the Numa Numa area, on 12th November, after which it was continually engaged on reconnaissance flights in support of II Corps. The aim of many of these early flights was to familiarise army officers with the geography of Bougainville and the main features of tactical importance.

In Bougainville the immediate task was defined as the relief of the American forces in the Torokina perimeter. The main enemy strength on the island was in the garden areas to the south of Torokina. Accordingly, Major-General Bridgeford's 3rd Division (7th, 15th and 29th Brigades), composed largely of Queenslanders, was allotted the southern sector of the Torokina perimeter with orders to patrol and obtain information. The 7th Brigade was at first placed in the central sector. The 11th Brigade was allotted the northern sector. Later the role of the corps was defined as follows:

> . . . the campaign to destroy the Japanese in Bougainville became resolved into three simultaneous offensives. The ultimate aim in the north was to force the enemy into the narrow Bonis Peninsula and there to destroy it. In the centre, the offensive was to clear the enemy from the high ground which gave undisturbed observation onto the approaches to the harbour and then by aggressive patrolling, to threaten the main enemy line of communication along the east coast. The main enemy concentration was in the garden area in the south and the decisive battle of the campaign must eventually be fought in southern Bougainville.[4]

The first action in Bougainville against the enemy was fought in the central sector along the Numa Numa trail, which cuts through a pass in the mountains and then leads to the east coast. The 9th Battalion of the

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[2] Air Cmdre G. N. Roberts, CBE, AFC. Comd NZ Air Task Force 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Auckland, NZ; b. Inglewood, Taranaki, NZ, 8 Dec 1906.

[3] AVM W. L. Hely, CBE, AFC. Director of Ops RAAF HQ 1941-42; SASO NW Area HQ 1942-43; Director of Plans RAAF HQ 1943-44; Comd 72 Wing 1944, 84 Wing 1944-45. Regular air force officer; b. Wellington, NSW, 24 Aug 1909.

[4] Commander Allied Land Forces, Report on Operations in Bougainville, New Britain and New Guinea.

7th Brigade, with the 12th Field Battery in support, took over this sector on 22nd November. The immediate task allotted to the brigade was to recapture Pearl Ridge and the high ground running north-east and north-west from it. On 25th November, the 9th Battalion took Little George Hill and prepared to seize Artillery Hill, a heavily-timbered spur of the Emperor Range. Artillery Hill was an intermediate objective some thousands of yards short of Pearl Ridge.

In the fighting that followed the Australian and New Zealand airmen played their part. The fight for Artillery Hill opened on 7th December. New Zealand Corsairs were led in to the strike by Australian Boomerangs. Flight Lieutenant Saunders[5] and Flying Officer Glassop[6] marked the area to be attacked, then the Corsairs went in dropping naval depth-charges. An area 150 yards square was laid bare, four huts were destroyed and others damaged.

The Japanese were concerned at the sudden development in Bougainville. A native deserter from Torokina had informed the Japanese in November that Australians were arriving in the perimeter but at first the information did not cause great surprise to the Japanese command. However, the enemy was alarmed when a sudden thrust was made in the Numa Numa area. There were about 2,000 Japanese troops there and the enemy hurried another regiment from the Tarlena sector in the north. Colonel Kaneko assumed command.

The commander of the 9th Battalion called for a strike on 13th December to open up the lip of the ridge. Flying Officers Glassop and Knudsen[7] took off from Piva North strip at 8.35 a.m. and met eight New Zealand Corsairs over the target area. They then led the Corsairs in to the target, directing their runs by radio-telephone. The entire area was patterned with 500-lb bombs.

Glassop then carried out a survey of the area and discovered a series of newly-prepared defence positions, weapon pits and trenches just below the lip of Artillery Hill and extending twenty-five yards in depth and seventy-five yards in length. He said he could see twenty-two Japanese in the trenches. The mortars opened up immediately, the first range-finding bombs overshooting the target and falling harmlessly down the eastern slope of the ridge. Glassop corrected the range and step by step directed the mortar bombs back until they began falling on the enemy positions. The position was mortared again next morning and a fresh slit trench was exposed at the northern end of the ridge overlooking the Australian positions farther down the western slope. It was found impossible to train mortar fire on this position, so Flying Officer McDavitt[8] made a series of strafing runs on it.

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[5] Sqn Ldr T. H. H. Saunders, 406960. 4 and 5 Sqns. Warehouse assistant; of Cottesloe, WA; b. Cottesloe, 11 Nov 1922. Killed in aircraft accident, 15 Mar 1952.

[6] Sqn Ldr R. H. Glassop, DFC, 403921. 22, 24, 76, 86 and 5 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Epping, NSW; b. Bondi, NSW, 5 May 1921.

[7] F-O D. B. Knudsen, 432957; 5 Sqn. Clerk; of Kingsford, NSW; b. Kingsford, 3 Dec 1924.

[8] F-Lt J. F. McDavitt, 428432; 5 Sqn. Machinery merchant; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Fitzroy, Vic, 13 Aug 1919.




Bougainville: showing perimeter.

The 9th Battalion planned its assault on Artillery Hill for 18th December. On the 17th, photographs taken by No. 5 Squadron showed previously-unknown Japanese trenches and dugouts on the southern edge of the ridge, and the plan of attack had to be altered to avoid having the troops caught in enfilading fire.

When the assault began on the 18th, Glassop was again over the area. Throughout the engagement he maintained a running commentary on the attack, which lasted forty-seven minutes. The Australians took the ridge and convinced the Japanese of the power and determination of their thrust. The enemy survivors withdrew to Pearl Ridge which was ideal for defence. It was manned by more than 500 combat troops and Major-General Kijima of the *38th Independent Mixed Brigade* now assumed command of the operations in the sector. The 9th Battalion was relieved by the 25th Battalion which immediately pushed on towards Pearl Ridge.

During the advance on Pearl Ridge, Boomerangs of No. 5 Squadron and New Zealand Corsairs again gave close support. A strike by eight Corsairs against Japanese positions on 30th December opened the way for the final assault. The Boomerang pilots directed mortar fire to mark the target area and then led the Corsair pilots in on their bombing runs, until the area was covered by depth-charges and 500-lb bombs. Two companies of the 25th Battalion then occupied a position on the western end of the feature, while two companies cut the enemy line of communication to the east and attacked westwards. On the following day the ridge was occupied. The capture of Pearl Ridge extended the Australian perimeter inland from Torokina and completed the first phase of the reconquest of Bougainville. No advance beyond Pearl Ridge was contemplated at this stage, but the Japanese believed further attacks were coming in the central sector and maintained considerable strength there.

The land campaign on the island now developed in two sectors, in each of which the R.A.A.F. was called on to cooperate with II Corps. They were:

1. Northern. Troops of the 11th Brigade moved north from Torokina along the coast in the direction of Soraken plantation and the Bonis Peninsula.
2. Southern. From bases near the Jaba river, Australian forces were to push down the south-western coast of Bougainville across the Puriata River towards Buin and Kahili.

In the northern sector the 11th Brigade advanced rapidly until further progress was barred at the end of January by strong enemy defensive positions on Tsimba Ridge. On 6th February, with supporting fire from artillery and mortars, the 31st/51st Battalion attacked and after three days determined fighting captured the ridge. Between 17th January and 26th February the Australian battalion lost 34 men killed, while the estimated enemy losses were 148 killed. As well as giving direct information, the R.A.A.F. reconnaissance aircraft found important targets during the engagement at Tsimba Ridge. The targets included artillery positions which

were engaged either by the Australian artillery or the New Zealand Corsairs.

On 3rd March, across the neck of northern Bougainville at Ruri Bay, a New Zealand Corsair on patrol reported seeing enemy tanks and called for an air strike. Squadron Leader Palmer,[9] commander of No. 5 Squadron, led the Corsairs to the target, and found one tank. This was in a small clearing and was stationary. Palmer, however, searched round the bay and found another hidden in the undergrowth at the edge of a clearing. Bombing and strafing attacks were made on both tanks, one being hit and left burning and the other damaged. Further attacks were made on tanks next day and a reconnaissance on 5th March showed that two had been destroyed.

Meanwhile, the 11th Brigade pushed on from Tsimba Ridge until by 28th March it had captured Soraken Peninsula.

South of Torokina, operations were begun on 10th December, when the 29th Brigade (of the 3rd Division) relieved the 182nd American Regiment. The first phase of General Savige's campaign was to be the capture of Mawaraka and Mosigetta which would be used as the jumping-off points for further advances.

Late in December, the 29th Brigade crossed the Jaba River, moved down the shores of Empress Augusta Bay and at the same time along tracks leading south from the general line of the Jaba River. No. 84 Wing was to concentrate most of its effort on aiding this southern advance. The nature of the country rendered tactical reconnaissance difficult. The maps of enemy-held territory were inaccurate and the wing was faced with three main problems: (*a*) locating enemy positions, movements and lines of communication, (*b*) pinpointing information with relation to physical features in preference to map positions, and correcting maps from air observation, (*c*) carrying out limited air photography as the basis for the production of revised maps.

On 25th December, a Wirraway of No. 5 Squadron, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Cory,[1] with Flying Officer Tucker[2] as observer, took off from Piva to drop supplies to Allied Intelligence Bureau patrols in the Kieta area. The engine of the Wirraway failed while the aircraft was flying up a gully under low cloud. Cory could not get the aircraft over a ridge and was forced to crash-land on a small ledge, about 60 feet by 30 feet, on the side of the ridge. Both Cory and Tucker were injured but they managed to free themselves from the wreck. Later in the day they were found by friendly natives, who kept them concealed from the Japanese, and established and maintained contact with an A.I.B. patrol for them until they were taken to an A.I.B. camp on 30th December. They remained

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[9] Sqn Ldr B. M. H. Palmer, DFC, 469. Comd 5 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Toowong, Qld; b. 14 Dec 1919.

[1] F-Lt G. R. I. Cory, DFC, 404387. 76, 75, 23, 21 and 5 Sqns. Grazier; of Dalveen, Qld; b. Grafton, NSW, 2 Aug 1910.

[2] F-Lt W. H. Tucker, 434378. 33, 38 and 5 Sqns. School teacher; of Bundaberg, Old: b. Childers, Qld, 3 Jan 1913.




Area of operations, First Tactical Air Force.

at this camp until 3rd January, when they were taken through the jungle by a party of natives under a patrol officer, to the advanced headquarters of the 2/8th Cavalry Commando Squadron on the Tagessi River. From there they were taken in a collapsible boat down river to the coast and then to Torokina by launch.

Flying Officer Russell[3] of No. 17 Air Observation Post Flight had a similar experience in December. Russell set out in an Auster on 26th December for Pusupa village to pick up a New Zealand airman who had been injured in an aircraft crash. On landing, Russell's Auster crashed, breaking the propeller. A new propeller was dropped the following day, but Russell, attempting to take off with his patient, could not get the Auster off the strip and crashed again. After destroying the aircraft, Russell set out on 28th December to walk to the coast with Flying Officer Sandford,[4] who was in charge of an Allied Intelligence Bureau patrol in the area. On arrival, four days later, Russell was picked up by a barge and taken to Torokina.

By 4th January, sufficient information concerning enemy dispositions had been obtained and orders were issued to the 29th Brigade to continue its southward advance by seizing Mawaraka, clearing the enemy from Motupena peninsula, and establishing a base in the Mawaraka area. At the same time plans were made to capture Mosigetta which would provide an advanced base for clearing the area south of the Puriata River.

Northern Solomons Air Command ordered frequent air strikes in support of the 29th Brigade's operations. On 11th January, Flight Lieutenant Vernon,[5] of No. 5 Squadron, flying in a Boomerang, led in a strike of New Zealand Corsairs against Mawaraka. Vernon dropped a smoke bomb to mark an aiming point for the twenty Corsairs which were to attack. His smoke bomb landed in the centre of the target. Later he was called on to drop another smoke bomb but he crashed into the target area as he went in to drop. On the same day, Glassop led in another flight of Corsairs in this area. He marked the target for the Corsairs by cannon fire. On 16th January Flying Officers Pascoe[6] and Hunt,[7] flying in a Wirraway, led in a flight of Corsairs against huts reported to be occupied by the Japanese near Mosigetta. The huts were demolished with depth-charges. There were further strikes next day (17th January) and on this day part of the 42nd Battalion moved by barge to the Adele River mouth, relieved the 47th Battalion, and advanced against light opposition to occupy Mawaraka.

It had now become evident to the Japanese that the Australians intended to conquer the entire island, and General Hyakutake issued orders that

[3] F-Lt J. A. Russell, 434270; 17 AOP Flight. Bank clerk; of Stanthorpe, Qld; b. Milton, NSW, 20 May 1912.

[4] F-Lt N. C. Sandford, DSO, 6610. 100 and 11 Sqns; AIB, Bougainville, 1944-45. Plantation manager; of Bougainville; b. Melbourne, 20 Jun 1911.

[5] F-Lt W. R. Vernon, 413455; 5 Sqn. Radio actor and commentator; of Darling Point, NSW; b. Sydney, 26 Oct 1914. Killed in action 11 Jan 1945.

[6] F-Lt W. J. Pascoe, 411816. 85, 24 and 5 Sqns. Commercial traveller; of North Sydney; b. Milson's Point, NSW, 13 Feb 1917.

[7] F-Lt R. H. Hunt, 415871. 35 and 5 Sqns. Cabinet maker; of Victoria Park, WA; b. South Perth, WA, 24 Dec 1923.

major contacts were to be avoided in all the three sectors. At the same time, aggressive delaying actions were to be fought. The Japanese brought artillery into play in the Mawaraka and Motupena Point areas, killing a number of Australians. Several air searches were made by aircraft of No. 5 Squadron to locate the guns but they failed. These guns had been sited and camouflaged excellently in the timber fringe on the edge of a swamp. They were found later by infantry patrols.

Throughout January, No. 5 Squadron had been able to meet all requests from the army. The position with No. 17 Air Observation Post Flight and No. 10 Communication Flight, however, had been far otherwise. Aircraft of the Air Observation Post Flight had to be grounded, because they all needed re-covering with fabric and perspex. Delay was experienced in obtaining the required materials. Stores were not arriving promptly at Torokina and the commander reported "there is no indication when the flight will become fully operational". Two months after being grounded the majority of these aircraft were still not serviceable because essential "dopes" had not arrived from the mainland.

After the occupation of Mawaraka by the 29th Brigade, the 7th Brigade relieved the 29th with orders to continue vigorous action before the enemy had had time to reorganise his forces. On 2nd February, General Bridgeford ordered the 7th Brigade to capture Mosigetta and establish a base for patrol operations to clear the area southwards to the Puriata River. They were then to seize the main ford at Puriata River.

The 7th Brigade advanced in a two-pronged drive on Mosigetta and captured it on 16th February. Shortly before Mosigetta fell a small airstrip was established near Mawaraka for use by Auster aircraft, and named Vernon, after Flight Lieutenant Vernon. During the drive on Mosigetta and the consolidation on the Puriata River, the Austers were used in contact and artillery reconnaissance. They were very useful for contact reconnaissance because in the difficult country in southern Bougainville patrols frequently became lost.

The continued advance southwards of the Australians caused General Kanda to change his plans, and he issued an instruction to his *6th Division* to put in a full-scale attack on the Puriata River if the Australians crossed it. The purpose of the operation was to inflict casualties and cause delay, so that Kanda could complete his preparations for the coming campaign.

On 26th February, II Corps issued orders to the 3rd Division to reconnoitre forward to the Hongorai River and clear the enemy to that line. The Australian anticipation of Japanese reaction was correct. It was expected that their advance would be opposed by a succession of determined delaying actions and to aid the Australian advance a regiment of artillery and a squadron of heavy tanks were brought forward. On 4th March the 25th Battalion crossed the Puriata River and advanced against light opposition, disposing its companies along the Buin Road. The enemy then began attacking each company position with such vigour that progress along the road was stopped. During the advance, the New Zealand

Corsairs, led in by the Boomerangs, pounded enemy positions and communications behind the line and as the Australians moved forward, blasted opposition immediately in their path.

On 29th March, the Japanese launched their major attack with 2,700 troops, of whom 1,000 were in reserve. Limited enemy successes at Slater's Knoll isolated the 25th Battalion's headquarters, and next day the Japanese had succeeded in isolating all four companies. The arrival of Matilda tanks in the area coincided with the launching of another heavy Japanese attack. The tanks attacked from the flank and their appearance temporarily upset the Japanese who fled and exposed themselves to fire from the Australian infantry. The enemy attacked again, however, at Slater's Knoll on 5th April, but suffered crippling casualties. In the period 28th March to 6th April, Australian casualties were 25 killed, while Japanese bodies buried totalled 620. The Japanese, after these heavy losses, withdrew and the offensive ended.

During the Japanese attack, New Zealand Corsairs, and Mitchells and Catalinas of the United States Marine Corps laid on repeated heavy attacks against enemy communications, supplies and defence positions. Tokinotu was twice heavily attacked early in April by Corsairs. On 6th April, Flying Officer Bailey,[8] flying in a Boomerang, led in thirty-four Corsairs in a close-support strike for the 7th Brigade.

During April, the 15th Brigade relieved the 7th and with the 24th Battalion resumed the advance supported by artillery and tanks. On 26th April the advance was aided by heavy air strikes by three squadrons of New Zealand Corsairs. The attack took place along a 700-yard strip of road in the Hiru Hiru area, down which the 24th Battalion was to advance. Progress was blocked by strong Japanese defensive positions. To clear the way, bombs had to be dropped in the jungle on either side of the road, twenty-five yards apart, and 300 yards ahead of the foremost Australian troops. Two Wirraways of No. 5 Squadron were to lead in the Corsairs.

The New Zealand squadrons held a combined briefing at Piva North at 6 o'clock that morning and took off an hour later. Cory, with Flying Officer Fisken[9] as observer, went in first, laying smoke bombs to indicate the track and then No. 14 Squadron R.N.Z.A.F. attacked in three sections, bombing to the left and to the right of the track. As soon as No. 14 Squadron had completed its task, No. 26 Squadron R.N.Z.A.F. followed, dropping 1,000-lb bombs. The aircraft formed up in pairs and made three strafing runs over the target. A third New Zealand squadron (No. 22) carried out the final attack. Shortly afterwards, further attacks were led in by a Wirraway piloted by Flying Officer Reynolds,[1] with Flying Officer Meadows[2] as observer. After these air attacks the ground advance was

[8] F-Lt K. J. Bailey, 35140; 5 Sqn. Salesman; of Mosman, NSW; b. Lithgow, NSW, 13 Jan 1919.
[9] F-Lt P. A. Fisken, 8013. 30 and 5 Sqns. Postal assistant; of Kilkenny, SA; b. Kilkenny, 19 Mar 1920.
[1] F-Lt E. G. Reynolds, 402541. 74 and 205 Sqns RAF, 77, 25, 23 and 5 Sqns. Student; of West Maitland, NSW; b. West Maitland, 25 May 1921.
[2] F-O F. W. Meadows, 415875. 36, 35 and 5 Sqns. Fireman; of Northam, WA; b. Cunderdin, WA, 21 Jun 1909.

resumed, only to be held up again by a strong enemy position a thousand yards along the road. This position was attacked from the air by twelve aircraft, and the enemy withdrew.

On 13th May, the 24th Battalion crossed the Hongorai River with tanks and established a patrol base from which to harass the enemy south of Egan's Ridge. On 30th May an offensive was launched to the south along the Buin road. Prior to the first attack, Glassop led in forty Corsairs which dropped bombs and strafed. This air attack was supplemented by a heavy artillery barrage and then the troops advanced. In addition to leading in many Corsair strikes, the Australian pilots also carried out artillery spotting. These activities were continued until the end of May when the 3rd Division called a halt to reorganise.

The pattern of R.A.A.F. and R.N.Z.A.F. support was similar in the central and northern sectors of the island. Pilots also flew in support of naval bombardments on the east coast. They "spotted" for the gunners, directing their fire.

In the centre there had been little call for R.A.A.F. assistance; the 23rd Brigade, after taking over from the 11th Brigade here, had advanced during May and taken Berry's Hill and Wearne's Hill. In the north the 11th Brigade had cut through the Bonis Peninsula to the east coast of Bougainville.

Timely and detailed information supplied to the units of II Corps, as well as supply-dropping and communication flights, had contributed towards the speed and success of the campaign. The R.A.A.F's operations in Bougainville had been hampered by a shortage of equipment and pilots. Group Captain Hely reported that there were not sufficient pilots to bring No. 5 Squadron up to establishment. There was also a shortage of Beaufort pilots "whilst the latest recruit to 17 Air Observation Post Flight" (Hely wrote in a report) "is ex-Liberator and is now undergoing conversion to light aircraft".

The Beauforts of No. 10 Local Air Supply Unit, as well as the Dakotas of No. 36 Squadron, were being used for supply dropping, and were also carrying out anti-malarial spraying, although this activity was limited by the small quantities of D.D.T. spray available. The Austers, based well forward in southern Bougainville, enabled detailed contact and reconnaissance to be maintained with the forward units. Close cooperation between tanks, infantry and aircraft was developed and to a considerable degree the Austers became the eyes of the battalion commanders.

From the commencement of Australian air operations on Bougainville, to 30th June 1945, the operational effort of No. 84 Wing units (including the detachment of Dakotas of No. 36 Squadron) was:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| No. 5 Squadron . . . . . | 1,839 | sorties |
| No. 17 AOP Flight . . . . . | 1,328 | „ |
| No. 10 Local Air Supply Unit . . | 144 | „ |
| No. 36 Squadron detachment . . | 781 | „ |

No. 5 Squadron continued its support of the southern Bougainville campaign in June, July and August. However, it was being called on less and

less for lead-in duties because of the improvement in the standard of training and map-reading by New Zealand pilots. In addition, contact reconnaissance duties were being taken over by the Austers.

In the north, the R.A.A.F. aided the infantry during a battle which followed the landing of a reinforced company of the 31st/51st Battalion at Porton plantation on the Bonis peninsula. The purpose of the landing was to outflank a strong enemy position in Buoi plantation. It was known that there were Japanese at Porton, but their strength was unknown.

At 4 a.m. on 8th June, the leading Australians landed at Porton without mishap, but the second wave of landing craft grounded on the coral about seventy-five yards from the shore. Hostile fire then opened up at close range. The enemy quickly reinforced the area and surrounded a perimeter which had been established by the Australians. The intensity of enemy fire prevented the landing of ammunition and stores. During 8th June aircraft of No. 5 Squadron flew in support of troops over Porton. Flying Officer Ellis[3] was the first on duty and he directed artillery fire on to a heavy machine-gun which had been firing on the Australians.

Captain Kato, the senior Japanese naval officer at Buka, rushed 150 troops to Porton to reinforce about 100 men already in contact and the Australians were slowly pushed back to the beach. The Australians called for air strikes and next morning Ellis led in twelve Corsairs. In the afternoon Flying Officer Witford[4] led in another sixteen Corsairs which bombed and strafed. Witford noted that enemy shells were falling around Australian barges in the area, and some of the troops were sheltering from enemy fire behind a barge broadside to the beach.

The Australian commander decided to evacuate. Aircraft flew constant patrols over the area next day to keep down hostile fire during the withdrawal. Ellis saw one barge with twelve men aboard reverse direction to pick up two men who had apparently swum from the shore. Enemy fire hit and destroyed another barge containing ammunition and equipment. South of Porton, Witford saw two men, who had apparently been hiding, come from a mangrove swamp and wave. After Witford had signalled for a rescue launch he dropped a bag of rations containing tins of water, salmon, and bully beef. Witford then guided the rescue boats in through the reefs. Three Beauforts of No. 10 Local Air Supply Unit then arrived to drop rafts to the stranded men, but because of the intense enemy fire the troops could not reach them. The Australians engaged in this ill-fated operation suffered heavy casualties and even heavier casualties would have resulted but for the air cover. Of the small force engaged, 23 were killed and 106 wounded.

In July the 3rd Division continued its advance to the south, reaching the Mivo River line where it paused to regroup. Strong enemy opposition

[3] F-O G. J. Ellis, 432372; 5 Sqn. Salesman; of Kingsgrove, NSW; b. Bondi, NSW, 25 Sep 1922.

[4] F-O J. L. Witford, 26931; 5 Sqn. Motor mechanic; of Croydon Park, SA; b. Alberton, SA, 19 Oct 1918.

including artillery barrages, challenged the advance early in the month and heavy rains made fords impassable. Supplies ran short because of rain and flood damage to communications and the Dakotas of No. 36 Squadron detachment were called on to increase their supply-dropping sorties.

Meanwhile, General Kanda prepared plans for a final decisive battle which he now believed to be imminent. He had considerable artillery weapons at his disposal. These were to be set up in a final perimeter to which all Japanese forces would withdraw and fight until the last round of ammunition was expended and then "give their lives for the Emperor". However, the Emperor's decision to surrender interrupted these plans, and the Japanese were startled in mid-August to see a Beaufort aircraft with the Japanese words "Japan surrenders" exhibited on the underside of its wings. On 18th August, an envoy from Kanda's headquarters crossed the Mivo under the protection of a white flag and opened negotiations for the surrender of the Japanese remaining on the island. Japanese strength at the surrender was 23,571, including naval men and civilian workers. An examination of Japanese records showed that 18,300 Japanese had died from all causes during the Australian occupation. This meant that when the Australians took over there were more than 40,000 Japanese in Bougainville and adjacent islands, although the XIV American Corps had estimated at the time of the take-over in November 1944 that there were then only 13,400. During the period of their ground operations in Bougainville, the Australians lost more than 500 killed; others died from sickness and accidents.

General Blamey assigned the 5th Australian Division to relieve the 40th American Division, which had remained as a garrison force in New Britain after the withdrawal of the U.S. Marines.

In 1944, Rabaul, in the north-eastern extremity of this island, was still by far the strongest Japanese base in the south Pacific. Japanese strength in New Britain had reached a peak of about 80,000, of whom 50,000 were army and 30,000 were navy men. The army formations were under the control of the *Eighth Area Army,* commanded by General Imamura, and included the *17th* and *38th Divisions.* The naval men were under the *South-Eastern Fleet* (commanded by Admiral Kusaka) and were organised into a naval guard and ancillary units. In spite of the imposing strength of the Japanese at Rabaul, however, they were incapable of offensive action outside New Britain because Allied naval and air interdiction had forced them to withdraw all aircraft and surface vessels from the New Guinea-New Britain-Solomons area. To escape the constant Allied air bombardments the Japanese had built elaborate underground defences at Rabaul; they had plentiful military supplies and their units were thoroughly trained to resist an Allied landing. The main force of the *17th Division* had been withdrawn from western New Britain and concentrated at Rabaul.

With their large concentrations of well-trained troops, abundance of ordnance and ammunition, and strong fortifications, the Japanese garrison waited with confidence for the Allied attack which at one time they thought would come. However, after the American landing on the Marianas, which by-passed Rabaul, the Japanese believed no attack would be made because Rabaul was no longer contributing directly to the defence of Japan. After the Australian landings in Bougainville and New Britain they still did not believe that a major attack would come, but if it did, they thought they could inflict at least 100,000 casualties.[5]

With the coming assumption by Australian forces of responsibility for New Britain, an operational policy had to be decided. General Blamey had to dismiss all thought of a major offensive there because there were not sufficient troops available. The policy decided on was "to drive the enemy patrols back to the Gazelle Peninsula and then regain control of the major portion of New Britain and contain a large force in the northern end of the island with a considerably smaller one".[6]

The American garrison in New Britain was not in contact with the enemy, having most of its strength concentrated in the Cape Gloucester area. The Australian commander decided to establish bases farther east from which to push on towards the Rabaul end of the island; and a reconnaissance party was sent to Jacquinot Bay early in September to discover whether it would be suitable as a base. This party embarked in H.M.A.S. *Kiama* and, under cover of Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron, landed and reported that Jacquinot Bay was suitable.

On 8th October, the 36th Battalion landed near Cape Hoskins and Talasea on the north coast of New Britain; it relieved the American forces there on 13th November. The main landing took place on 4th November at Jacquinot Bay. It was, of course, expected that the landing at Jacquinot Bay would be unopposed since no enemy forces had been reported in the area. However, to guard against the possibility that the enemy might suddenly have sent troops there, the landing was planned as a minor combined operation with limited naval and air force cooperation.

H.M.A.S's *Barcoo, Vendetta* and *Swan* provided escort for the convoy, while, if required, Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron reinforced by detachments from Nos. 8 and 100 would bomb the landing area before 6 o'clock on the morning of 4th November. Two other Beauforts were to take up positions over the area to observe and report on the naval bombardment.

Group Captain Lachal of Northern Command Headquarters was aboard *Vendetta* to coordinate R.A.A.F. support. There were no Japanese in the landing area, however, so he cancelled the order for the Beauforts. On landing at Jacquinot Bay, Lachal was greeted by Flight Lieutenant Koch,[7]

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[5] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol I, pp. 209-10: Commander Doi.

[6] General Blamey's appreciation to War Cabinet, 18 May 1945.

[7] F-Lt H. R. Koch, MC, 276393. (1st AIF: Capt 15 Bn.) AIB patrol, New Britain. Planter: of Arawe, New Britain; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 25 Aug 1885.

who had been acting as a coastwatcher in New Britain for many months previously. He had a group of native guerillas with him.

Much of the R.A.A.F. contribution to the reduction of enemy power in New Britain during late 1944 and 1945 was made by No. 6 Squadron. A rigid aerial and naval blockade was being reinforced by air and naval units of the United States and New Zealand in this period over New Britain, while Rabaul, the focus of enemy power, was subjected to frequent bombardment.

No. 6 Squadron had bombed Rabaul on numerous occasions in 1943 and early 1944, but from March 1944 most of its operations had been on shipping escort and anti-submarine patrols, with little incident. In August 1944, the pilots took part in a bombardment of the Wide Bay area in conjunction with the *Swan*. It was the first strike carried out by many of the new crews on the squadron since they arrived from Australia. The aircraft position of the squadron until October 1944 was not satisfactory. It had been receiving mostly Beauforts which had been given major overhauls after service on other squadrons in New Guinea and then re-allotted to No. 6. The result was that the aircraft soon needed much maintenance work. However, the difficulty had been overcome by allotting a percentage of new Beauforts to No. 6.

In October, to cover the landing at Jacquinot Bay, the Australian Beauforts renewed their bombardment of Rabaul. The first strike (on 26th October) preceded the army landing by nine days, and Beauforts from three squadrons (Nos. 6, 8 and 100) took part. Detachments from Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons operated with No. 6 from Vivigani (Goodenough Island) for the operations. Targets allotted for the strike were: (*a*) stores in the vicinity of Tobera airfield and (*b*) anti-aircraft positions. The eighteen Beauforts which took part began taking off at 5.5 p.m. and all were airborne eight minutes later.

The two targets were each attacked by nine aircraft from 10,500 feet to 11,500 feet, bombing runs being made individually at one-minute intervals. Apart from the bursting of the bombs and small fires caused by incendiary bombs, little could be seen. Compared with the heavy anti-aircraft fire experienced by the Beauforts in their missions against Rabaul earlier, the anti-aircraft fire encountered on the 26th October was light. Ground flashes only were reported. One of two searchlights, located mid-way between Tobera and Rapopo airfields, flicked directly on to one aircraft indicating that the enemy had radar equipment in operation.

The following evening the three squadrons attacked Rabaul again, the target this time being stores in the northern part of the township. Most of the bombs fell in the target area.

On 29th October a third and final three-squadron strike on Rabaul took place when twenty Beauforts attacked stores areas on the west side of Rabaul township as far south as Malaguna. The aircraft attacked at two-minute intervals. They were over the target for a full hour.

Early in the morning of 6th November, the Beauforts of all three squadrons were called on to bomb in the Wide Bay area. Allied Intelli-

gence Bureau patrols had reported that there were at least 1,000 Japanese in the area and the plan was for a joint air and naval strike. Eleven Beauforts from No. 6 Squadron and six each from Nos. 8 and 100 attacked Waitavalo plantation and north of Kalai plantation. A medium gun position was straddled with 250-lb bombs. No. 8 Squadron and two spotting aircraft of No. 6 Squadron bombed targets at the junction of two creeks north of Kalai plantation with good coverage reported. After this strike at Wide Bay the detachments from Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons returned to their main base at Tadji.

On 23rd November, No. 6 Squadron resumed attacks on much-battered Rabaul. Extremely bad weather on the 23rd made the operation difficult. However, the crews bombed Vunakanau, Rapopo and Tobera airfields, but without observing results because of the heavy cloud which covered the target area. One of the Beauforts in this strike (captained by Warrant Officer McGifford[8]) had its navigation instruments put out of action over the target. However, the crew brought it back to Dobodura where it arrived in heavy rain. It circled the airfield until petrol ran low and then crash-landed on a beach twenty miles away. The aircraft came to rest on a road. All four members of the crew were injured.

A second Beaufort, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Wymond,[9] also ran into grave trouble. Shortly before it reached the target, lightning struck the aircraft, blowing up the radio equipment. The captain thereupon jettisoned his bombs and headed back for base. However, with instruments out of action, the crew lost their bearings and when fuel supplies had fallen to fifty gallons the captain decided to ditch the aircraft near Wanigela Mission in Collingwood Bay. The captain put the aircraft down in the sea about three-quarters of a mile from the shore. The crew were injured slightly when the Beaufort hit the water. They released a dinghy and half an hour later natives in a lakatoi took them ashore. On the nights of 26th-27th, 27th-28th and 28th-29th November No. 6 Squadron again attacked Rabaul.

No. 6 Squadron was now the only Allied squadron carrying out operations from Goodenough Island and with the movement of other units from the area it had become isolated. An acute shortage of aviation fuel interfered with operations in November and it was found necessary to fly aircraft to Kiriwina and Milne Bay to refuel. Shipments of fuel which arrived on 29th and 30th November helped to relieve the position.

In December the squadron made six strikes, all against the Rabaul area. A total of forty-nine sorties was flown against the target and thirty tons of bombs were dropped. Two of the strikes, those on 25th and 31st December, were made in daylight and the crews found that better results were obtained than on the night strikes.

During December the squadron began to move from Goodenough to a better location at Dobodura. An advance party was sent to Dobodura

[8] P-O R. McGifford, 411346. 7, 9 and 6 Sqns. Plumber; of Haberfield, NSW; b. Belfast, Ireland, 15 Oct 1915.

[9] F-Lt A. P. Wymond, 416476. 6 Sqn and 9 LASU. Research chemist; of Tusmore, SA; b. Adelaide, 17th May 1919.

on 17th December, about one-third of the personnel had moved by 22nd December, and the main party arrived a month later. The move of the squadron was made without interference to its operational activities and, under the command of Wing Commander Waddy,[1] it maintained attacks against Rabaul. From 5th to 29th January, strikes against New Britain targets were made every three days. Targets included Ralum, the aircraft park at Sulphur Creek, Tobera, Rabaul, Vunakanau and Matupi Island.

On 17th and 18th January the squadron was instructed to convoy the flagship of the British Pacific Fleet, H.M.S. *Howe,* and other ships of the Royal Navy proceeding through the area on the way to their first engagement against the Japanese. The fleet was sighted at 6.50 a.m. on 17th January in the channel between Woodlark Island and the Trobriands. A daylight to dusk air cover was provided by the Beauforts during the first day and on 18th January it was convoyed from daylight to 2.20 p.m., when the force was left in Vitiaz Strait between New Britain and New Guinea.

Meanwhile, the Australian troops which landed at Cape Hoskins had pushed steadily along the north coast to Open Bay. Contact had been made with enemy patrols on 10th November and reinforcements were brought up. However, by January the enemy had withdrawn and, by the end of that month, the 36th Battalion had established its main base at Ea Ea, sending out patrols forward to Mavelo plantation at Open Bay. It was supported by occasional strikes of Beaufort aircraft from No. 6 Squadron. One such strike took place on 7th March when six Beauforts, led in by a Boomerang from No. 5 Squadron, bombed enemy troops in and near huts at Cooper's Clearing.

A detachment of No. 5 Squadron, under the command of Flight Lieutenant Agg,[2] had been sent from Bougainville to Cape Hoskins on 17th February and, from the airfield there, it operated in support of the 5th Division in New Britain. Unfortunately, two of the four Boomerangs sent, crashed on arrival at Hoskins and until replacements could be provided, operations were on a limited scale.

Again on 25th and 31st March, the Beauforts bombed and strafed small concentrations of enemy troops at the Matalaili River junction.[3]

On 27th December the Australian force on the southern side of the island began its advance when companies of the 14th/32nd Battalion moved forward from Jacquinot Bay to Sampun. The first contact was made with the enemy on 12th February near Kalai plantation on Wide Bay. An enemy force held up the advance at this plantation and an air and artillery strike was called for. Eight Beauforts of No. 6 Squadron were assigned to this task and they were guided in to the attack by mortar smoke bombs fired by the infantry. All targets indicated by the mortars

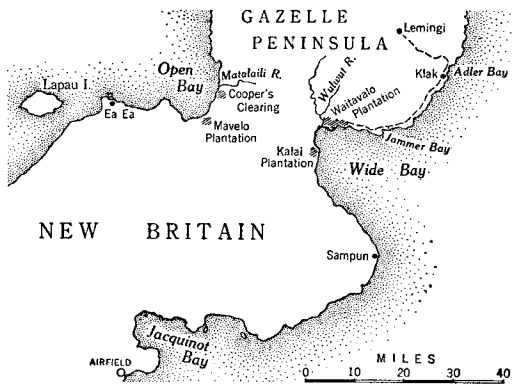
[1] W Cdr B. C. Waddy, 88. Comd Air Armament School 1942-43; 100 Sqn: comd 6 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of North Bondi, NSW; b. Glenelg, SA, 3 Mar 1916.

[2] F-Lt H. L. M. Agg, 400966. 4 and 5 Sqns. Clerk; of Gardenvale, Vic; b. Elsternwick, Vic, 7 Jul 1916.

[3] The old problem of the time-lag between receipt of an army request for close-support and the actual attack once again arose. The 5th Division compiained that often 24 hours elapsed before aircraft came from Dobodura.

were bombed and the crews could discern enemy trenches as they went in to attack. The enemy withdrew after the bombing and the Australians occupied the Japanese positions.

Another air strike in support of the infantry was called for on 26th February to bomb and strafe enemy positions at the base of a hill near Kalai plantation. A Wirraway from the No. 5 Squadron detachment, piloted by Flying Officer Kidman,[4] led in six Beauforts on the strike. The target proved difficult to bomb. Some of the Beauforts missed it by a considerable distance and it was doubtful whether the remainder succeeded in scoring useful results.




By early March the Australians had reached the Waitavalo plantation, where the enemy maintained defensive positions. The enemy's objective, however, was not to fight any large-scale actions but to cause delay and inflict casualties until the Australians reached their main defences close to Rabaul. On 4th March the 19th Battalion was actively patrolling to determine the nature of the enemy defences at Waitavalo, and on 6th March, after an air strike and with artillery support, two companies secured a footing on the western end of the long spur running down from the Waitavalo feature to the Wulwut River. On 13th March seven Beauforts again attacked in support of the troops in this sector. The target was indicated by mortar smoke bombs laid by the infantry. After bombing, strafing runs were carried out on another target which was also marked by smoke. Two days later the Beauforts, led by Waddy, attacked the same area again. The target was marked with smoke shells from 25-pounder guns and again the bombs hit the target indicated. Because of the heavy jungle growth, however, it was impossible to determine what effect the bombing had. Immediately after the strike the 14th/32nd Battalion began an attack on the final enemy positions at Waitavalo and after two days fighting the positions were occupied.

After the capture of Waitavalo, the troops moved along the coast to Jammer Bay and northwards along the Lemingi track. A patrol of the New Guinea Infantry Battalion moved across the peninsula and made contact with the 36th Battalion in the Open Bay area.

Early in April, No. 6 Squadron carried out three more strikes in New Britain. Three aircraft on 2nd April attacked targets at Klak, five on 4th

[4] F-O H. T. Kidman, 442350; 5 Sqn. Student; of Glenelg, SA; b. Adelaide, 14 May 1925.

April concentrated on enemy naval guns in Adler Bay, and on 8th April against huts occupied by the enemy in the Lemingi area. The squadron's supply of bombs at Dobodura was practically exhausted at this stage, and the aircraft had to call in at Kiriwina to pick up bombs. The squadron also carried out seven supply-dropping missions during April. On one of these missions, on 11th April, a Beaufort piloted by Warrant Officer Mahoney[5] disappeared. Until the end of the war in New Britain there were very few clashes with the enemy and patrolling in the area continued without serious opposition, until the end.

Air Vice-Marshal Bostock had assigned No. 79 Wing, with its two Mitchell squadrons, Nos. 2 and 18 (N.E.I.) and No. 120 (N.E.I.) Squadron to give close air support to army operations in eastern New Britain. Operation instructions for the move of the wing had been issued on 31st December 1944. However, the airfield at Jacquinot Bay, in spite of vigorous efforts by the army, was not ready for operations until late in March 1945 and in the meantime the Dutch authorities had made representations to General Headquarters, asking that N.E.I. squadrons should be employed in Dutch territory. On 9th May, therefore, Bostock cancelled the order and assigned No. 79 Wing (less No. 120 Squadron) to First Tactical Air Force for operations in Borneo. No. 120 Squadron was to be sent to Biak. To replace No. 79 Wing, the New Zealand Air Task Force, which had now come under Australian control, was directed to send squadrons to Jacquinot Bay. The New Zealanders began moving in during May, but were delayed by congestion caused by the slow departure of units of No. 79 Wing. Work was also hampered by the very heavy rain which fell in this period. However, by 29th May, No. 20 Squadron R.N.Z.A.F. began flying offensive patrols over Rabaul. The pilots strafed troops and barges and bombed until 12th August when operations ceased.

No. 6 Squadron R.A.A.F. supported operations in the New Guinea area during May 1945, after which it was comparatively inactive.

At the war's end, a total of 101,000 Japanese surrendered in New Britain and New Ireland. During the war 20,548 tons of bombs had been dropped on Rabaul by aircraft of the United States, Australia and New Zealand, and 380 tons of projectiles had been fired on the town and harbour by naval vessels.[6] The authors of the United States Strategic Bombing Survey came to the conclusion, after examining the results of the bombing, that "attacks on Rabaul and other by-passed positions were continued longer and in greater volume than required". However, a very large enemy ground force had been cut off in Rabaul and continued aerial blows had forced the garrison to move underground. It had been deprived of sea and air weapons and depressed by the constant harassment from the air, and it had been necessary to deploy only a small force of Australian infantry and small air and naval forces to keep the Japanese garrison under surveillance for the remainder of the war.

[5] W-O J. K. Mahoney, 427290; 14 and 6 Sqns. Plumber; of Beaconsfield, WA; b. Fremantle, WA, 4 Mar 1922. Killed in action 11 Apr 1945.

[6] The tonnages are from the US Strategic Bombing Survey, *The Allied Campaign Against Rabaul*, p. 13.

CHAPTER 20

# FROM AITAPE TO WEWAK

IN mid-1944 General Blamey had committed the 6th Australian Division to relieve XI American Corps at Aitape in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea. The R.A.A.F's Northern Command, with headquarters at Madang, was to support the 6th Division, employing the Beauforts of No. 71 Wing and miscellaneous aircraft of the United States Combat Replacement and Training Centre, over which Northern Command had operational control.

Of the Japanese in the Mandated Territory, those remaining of the *XVIII Army,* were disposed in two main areas. Some 16,000 were on the coastal plain between the Danmap River and the mouth of the Sepik and on Kairiru and Muschu Islands. Some 5,000 were scattered through the villages in the highlands south of the Torricelli and Prince Alexander Ranges. The main enemy concentration to the south of the ranges was at Maprik. The remaining 3,000-odd, mainly base troops, many unarmed, were in the villages in the valley of the Sepik.

The Torricelli and Prince Alexander Ranges were the dominant topographical features in the area where the campaign was to develop. The Torricellis are from 4,000 to 5,000 feet high and consist of a series of rugged and heavily wooded ridges cut by deep gorges. The northern slopes fall away steeply to a narrow coastal plain. To the south, where the mountains dip down into the valley of the wide Sepik River, the slope is more gradual.

The coastal plain varies in width from twelve miles around Aitape, to three miles at Wewak. It is cut by numerous rivers and streams, which, after the rains, flood quickly, making passage from east to west difficult. Communications to the south are hampered by a confused series of ridges and gorges, all heavily timbered. The foothills merge into sparsely-wooded grasslands and farther south the grasslands meet the swamps which extend north from the Sepik. These swamps cannot be crossed except where tongues of dry land reach the Sepik itself. The Aitape-Wewak area, in common with the rest of the island areas north of Australia, did not lend itself easily to surface communication, and therefore posed a difficult supply problem to which the answer, especially in the inland area, was aircraft transport.

The Americans, as has been shown, did not intend to undertake a campaign to wipe out the enemy remaining in New Guinea. When General Adachi, commander of *XVIII Japanese Army,* had attacked their base at Aitape in August 1944, the Americans had inflicted heavy casualties. Since the enemy's withdrawal after this defeat, there had been little contact between the opposed forces. Most of the XI American Corps was entrenched behind barbed wire round Aitape itself with one regiment stationed forward at the Driniumor River.

General Adachi considered that Japanese military honour had been satisfied after his attack on the Americans at Aitape and ordered the remnants of his force to withdraw. His new operational objective was to turn his whole force into infantry and defend the Wewak-But area and to dispose part of the *41st Division* south of the Torricelli mountains.[1] The *51st Division* would defend Wewak and the lower reaches of the Sepik; the *20th Division* would defend the two But airfields and the *41st* would be responsible for preventing the enemy approaching from the west and south of the Torricellis.

After the failure of his offensive, Adachi's main problem was to feed his army. The coastal area produced little food and only an occasional submarine brought supplies from Japan. Consequently a considerable force of Japanese had been established in mountain villages among native gardens. In the Aitape operations the two divisions engaged (the *20th* and *41st*) were reduced from about 17,000 to about 9,000. Both divisions had lost a majority of battalion commanders and many of the officers and almost all the men became weakened in mind and body because of malnutrition, malaria and other illnesses. "From about the end of September to the middle of October 1944 some units had a daily death rate as high as 10 to 30 per cent. . . . Stragglers and casualties starved to death."[2] Lieut-Colonel Yasuzo Shibazaki, an engineer, who reported after the war on Japanese conditions at Wewak, said:

> Around July and August 1944 our food supply, even to our construction units, began to seem scarce. The enemy had begun their raids on Wewak and supply depots were being destroyed. Shipping was completely cut by the air raids. The early part of March 1944 saw the last ships come in from the mainland [of Japan]. After that, I cannot remember any ships coming in with supplies. By this time the entire Japanese forces in New Guinea were low on food—some were not only low but had nothing left. Since August 1944 we had been living on food made from a type of palm tree very common in New Guinea—we called it "sago" palm. . . . Of course we got tired of it, but it kept us alive. Many of the men became bloated with this starchy diet. Some died. The natives called this food "sac sac". It seemed that they ate it a lot too. The water along the coast was not good. Some of our men died after drinking it. From August 1944 until the end of the war we lived under these conditions . . . our road building work was abandoned because all our trucks were broken down and lost. But this did not mean that the battle was to stop. The enemy continued fighting. All the unit headquarters were under constant raids beginning with *XVIII Army Headquarters* and the headquarters of the *20th, 41st* and *51st Divisions*. Every raid brought about twenty planes, fighters and bombers included. The headquarters were scattered over a large area, with Wewak the centre.[3]

Australian troops began arriving at Aitape in October 1944. At this time, the American forces there were training for operations in the Philippines. The perimeter around the airfield at Tadji was only lightly manned and the outposts on the Driniumor River and at Babiang were not in contact with the enemy. By 28th October a squadron of the 2/6th

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[1] Japanese Monograph No. 39 (GHQ Tokyo).

[2] Japanese Monograph No. 39 (GHQ Tokyo).

[3] Interrogation (Historical Div, GHQ Tokyo).

Cavalry Regiment, the 2/10th, was at Babiang and another squadron, the 2/9th, had occupied Aiterap, Kamti and Palauru. From these outposts the 2/9th patrolled the trails leading south over the Torricellis but made no contact with the enemy. The 2/10th which patrolled in the coastal area west of the Danmap River had numerous clashes with enemy patrols and killed seventy-one Japanese.

Until September the Beauforts of No. 71 Wing at Aitape had been under the operational control of Air Commodore Cobby's No. 10 Group. However, because the wing was not to go forward to Morotai, it was detached from this group and returned to the operational control of Northern Command. Its primary role was to provide support for the 6th Division.

Under the command of Wing Commander Moran until October 1944, and thereafter Wing Commander Cooper,[4] Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons of this wing continued to carry out attacks on dumps, airfields, and troop concentrations of the Japanese *XVIII Army* in the Wewak-But area. In September 1944 they mounted 595 sorties and in October 306.

Although the aircraft and aircrew position of the Beaufort squadrons was satisfactory, much of the wing's equipment, including 146 vehicles, remained at Goodenough. Air Commodore Lukis reported that, because no shipping space had been allotted for trans-shipment to Tadji, many of the vehicles "are gradually being claimed by jungle". In October 1944 No. 37 Operational Base Unit arrived at Tadji, but as no tentage, equipment or resources of any kind came with the unit, it could not operate immediately. When, after much delay, ships were provided for moving equipment, they were held up for weeks in the roadstead off Aitape waiting to be unloaded. There was frequently a high surf running and, as there were no port facilities, unloading was often interrupted.

When the American No. 305 Aerodrome Squadron was withdrawn from Tadji the resources of the R.A.A.F. wing were inadequate to provide airfield services. All petrol had to be pumped from drums into tankers and this resulted in delay in refuelling visiting aircraft. In spite of difficulties and shortages, however, the wing continued to operate satisfactorily.

In September an advanced party of No. 7 Squadron arrived at Aitape. This squadron, equipped with Beauforts, had been under orders to move to Aitape since July. Ten R.A.A.F. Dakota transports were used to transport the main party and squadron equipment which were moved from Higgins to Aitape between 21st and 26th October in forty-eight trips. After the movement of the main party, nineteen Beauforts of the squadron were flown to Aitape in two echelons, with additional personnel and equipment. Twelve Beauforts made the trip on 29th October, carrying forty-five passengers and considerable freight in addition to the crews. On 1st November the remaining seven aircraft left Higgins with twenty-eight passengers and equipment. The entire move had been carried out

[4] W Cdr E. W. Cooper, AFC, 260093. Comd 73 Sqn 1943, 7 Sqn 1944, 71 Wing 1944-45. Wholesale fruit merchant; of Ashfield, NSW; b. Summer Hill, NSW, 29 Mar 1915.

by air. The squadron was declared operational at Tadji on 3rd November and that day nine of its Beauforts bombed targets of opportunity between Niap and Wewak.

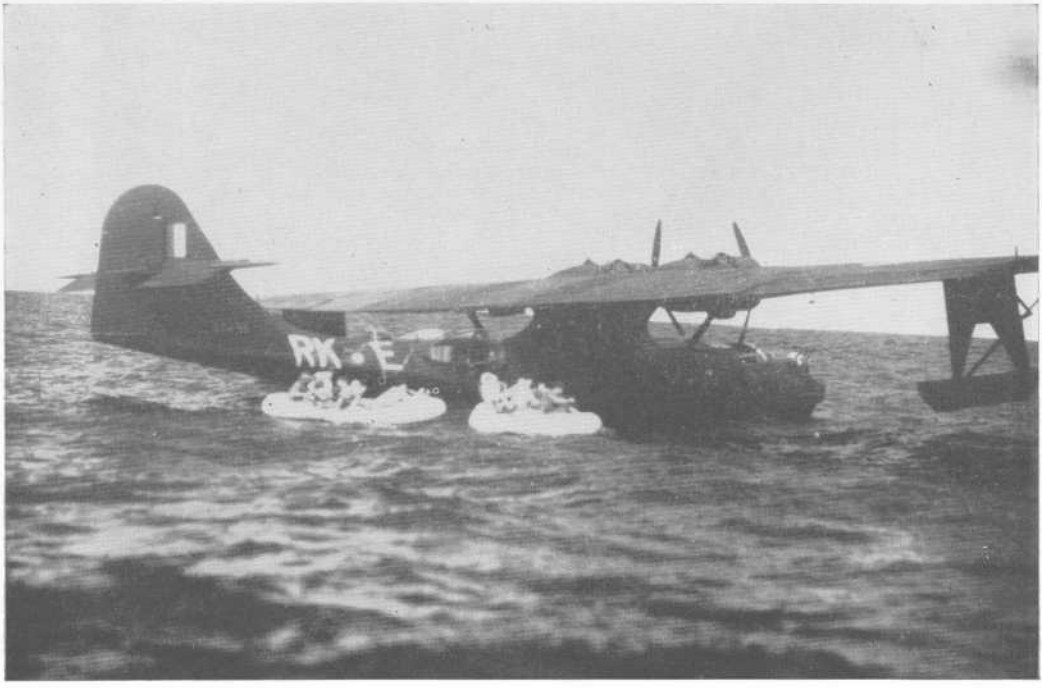
In preparation for its task with the 6th Division, No. 71 Wing was further reinforced by a flight from No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which began operations early in November 1944. In addition to its primary role of supporting the operations against the *XVIII Army,* the Beaufort wing had the task of carrying out anti-submarine patrols in the Hollandia-Wewak area. Hollandia was an important American base and had to be well protected, and there were signs that Japanese submarines were still operating in the area. A surfaced transport submarine was sighted offshore from the But airfield on 6th November. A striking force of Beauforts was sent from Tadji the same afternoon to attack the submarine and also about 35 motor trucks seen near But airfield, but neither target could be seen when the Beauforts arrived over the airfield. The target area was, however, well plastered with bombs.

Spasmodic but effective anti-aircraft fire from Boram brought down three low-flying aircraft of the Combat Replacement and Training Centre on 10th and 11th November. After the captain of one of these had "ditched" his Mitchell in the sea, the members of the crew managed to climb into a dinghy. They paddled desperately to prevent themselves drifting shorewards. A Beaufort of No. 71 Wing was sent immediately to prevent the enemy sending out boats to capture the Americans. Meanwhile, a Catalina from Madang was to rendezvous over the area with twenty-two Beauforts drawn from Nos. 7, 8 and 100 Squadrons. The Catalina (captained by Flight Lieutenant Wood[5]) landed right under the Japanese guns while the Beauforts heavily bombed the Japanese gun-positions. The bombing was so effective that not a shot was fired from the enemy shore. The six Americans boarded the Catalina, which then took off.

The 6th Division's campaign in November developed into two simultaneous drives, one along the coast, the other inland towards Maprik. In the coastal sector the 19th Brigade was given the initial task of cutting the enemy's communication route to the inland area. This route ran through the villages of Abau-Malin, Walum and Amam. After cutting this line the brigade was to destroy all enemy forces between the Danmap River and the line Abau-Malin. By early December the enemy had been cleared from the area between the Danmap and the Danmul Rivers and, on 17th December, a company of the 2/4th Battalion crossed the Danmap and patrolled along the coastal track against only slight opposition.

Meanwhile, to the south, the 2/6th Cavalry Regiment, working with Angau detachments which had been long in the area, had gained control of the Tong district where the only enemy met were stragglers and small foraging parties. The largest enemy concentration south of the divide was

[5] F-Lt I. J. L. Wood, DFC, 414977. 20 Sqn, 8 Communication Unit and 111 ASR Flight. Instructor and inspector in agriculture, Territory of New Guinea; of Carinda, Qld; b. Ipswich, Qld, 26 Aug 1914.



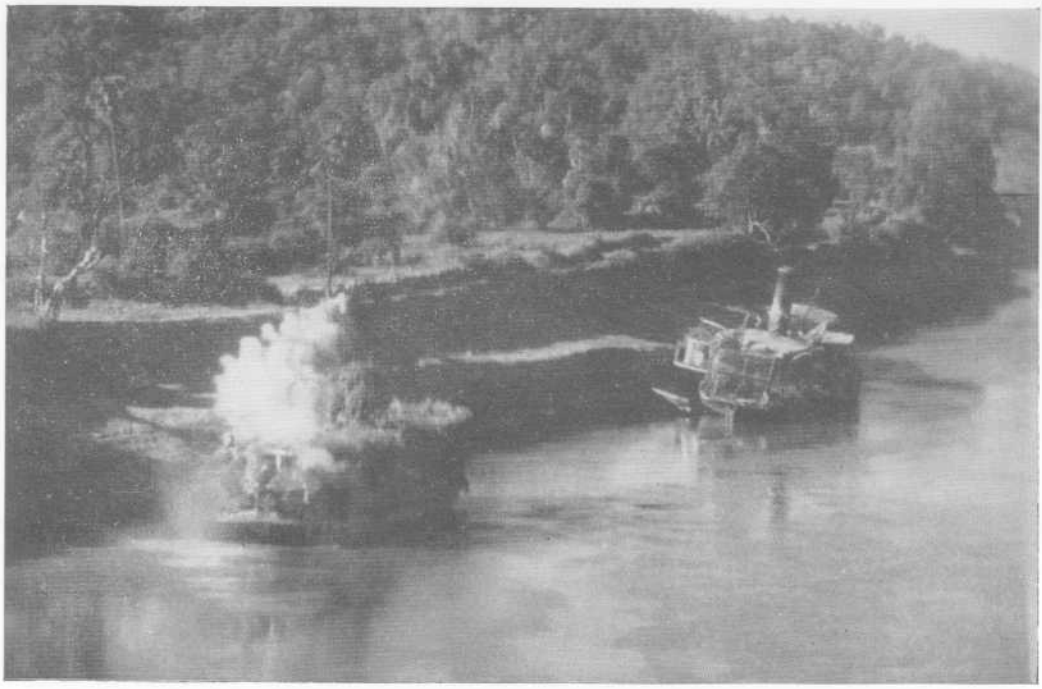
*(R.A.A.F.)*

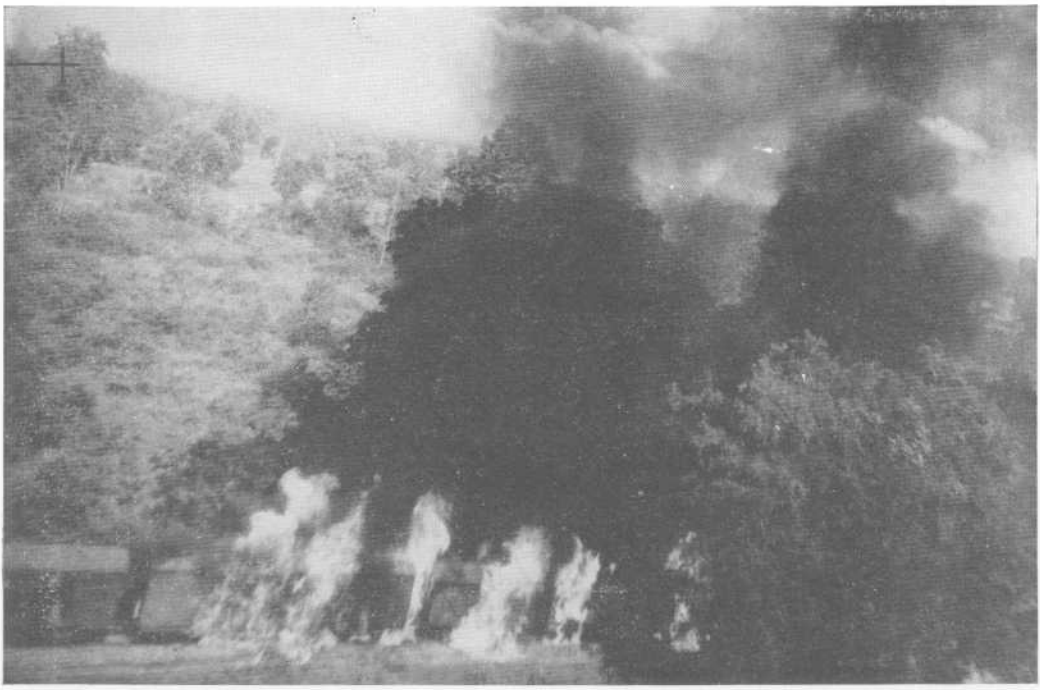
A Catalina of No. 43 Squadron captained by F-Lt B. Ortlepp rescuing the crew of a Catalina of No. 42 Squadron which had to alight on the open sea while carrying out a minelaying operation on 14th January 1945.



*(No. 54 Squadron Diary.)*

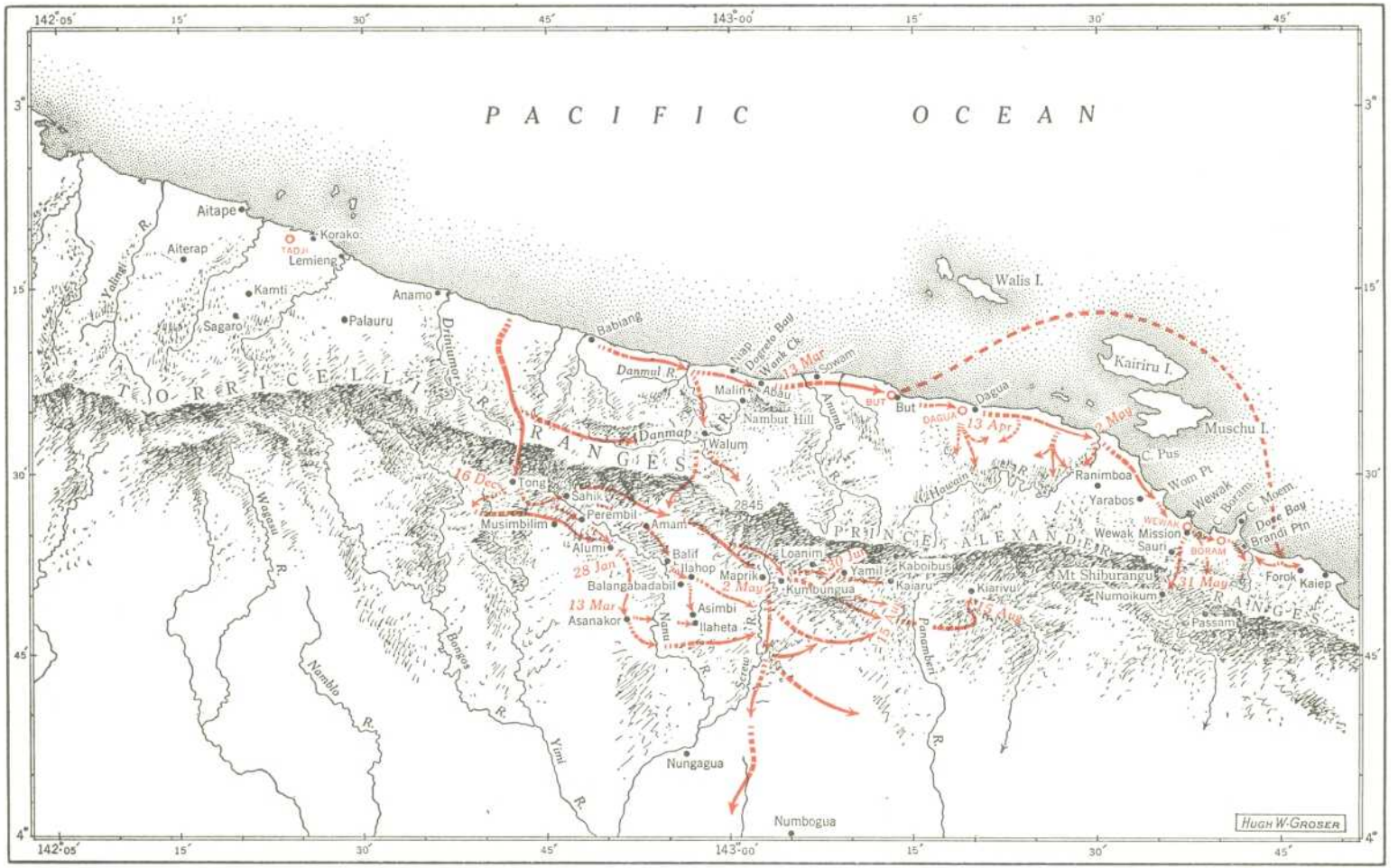
Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron based at Sattler, Northern Territory, flying in formation on 20th January 1945.





*(R.A.A.F.)*

Attacks by Beaufighters on two forms of Japanese supply lines. Top: A paddle-steamer is strafed along the water-line and set on fire. The success of this method of attack can be seen from the wreck of the paddle-steamer *Shwelan,* which, after a previous attack, has been burnt out and has gone aground. Lower: A train carrying oil and petrol is set on fire north-west of Kokkogon in 1944. Burning petrol can be seen flowing out of the damaged trucks.




Aitape-Wewak operations.

at Maprik. Late in December Brigadier Moten's[6] 17th Brigade moved into the area and began a series of patrol operations. There were a large number of native villages connected by a maze of tracks and in these villages were small detachments of Japanese who lived on food from the natives' gardens.

In support of these operations, No. 71 Wing's three squadrons flew a total of 492 sorties in November and 515 in December. Maprik was heavily bombed by all three squadrons in November, as was Ranimboa village, ten miles west of Wewak. The Beauforts also bombed Walum, Dagua, Tong, But and Sahik villages during November. In December Musimbilim and Perembil villages were the most frequently hit. All three squadrons bombed these villages, Perembil being bombed on 26th, 28th, 29th and 31st December.

In January No. 71 Wing flew 561 sorties, of which 106 were anti-submarine patrols. Stores, ammunition and fuel dumps were seen at Cape Moem during the month, and on the 17th, 18th and 19th Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons made concentrated attacks in this area, destroying many of these targets.

By January the aircrew position in No. 71 Wing, which in September 1944 had been satisfactory, had deteriorated, and crew strengths were barely two-thirds of the establishment. Because of this, and unduly low stocks of fuel and bombs in the area, it was not possible to increase the operational effort of the wing.

On 12th January an enemy submarine sank an American tanker in Humboldt Bay and the United States Seventh Fleet called on No. 71 Wing to carry out air search operations. The Seventh Fleet was concerned about the submarine threat to Hollandia, which at this stage was a major port for the departure of convoys to the Philippines and the transfer of fuel from overseas tankers to tankers for forward movement. Representations made by the R.A.A.F. to the Seventh Fleet that "anti-submarine searches be reviewed, and if possible eliminated" met with a refusal. Not only did these patrol duties strain the resources of No. 71 Wing but the situation was aggravated by the difficulty, common in other areas, of obtaining precise information on shipping movements.

In January the shortage of fuel caused a restriction of operations for three weeks until a ship carrying fuel arrived. Northern Command warned on 2nd February that anti-submarine patrols and support for the 6th Division would have to cease on 8th February because of lack of fuel, but the arrival of further supplies prevented a breakdown.

Enemy resistance to the 6th Division at Malin and Balif was increasing and it was expected that there would be a greater call from the army for bombing effort. Allied Air Forces therefore made further representations to the Seventh Fleet concerning the shipping cover at Hollandia, pointing out that R.A.A.F. forces at Tadji were fully employed in supporting the land forces in the Wewak area and were in the area for that particular

[6] Brig M. J. Moten, CBE, DSO, ED, SX2889. CO 2/27 Bn 1940-41; comd 17 Bde 1941-45. Bank officer; of Woodville, SA; b. Hawker, SA, 3 Jul 1899. Died 14 Sep 1953.

purpose. Air cover was absorbing a great part of the R.A.A.F's effort at the expense of support for the ground forces. Again a request was made that "day and night staging patrols 100 miles seaward of Hollandia may be reduced and eliminated". The Seventh Fleet finally agreed, "in view of . . . reduced likelihood of submarine attack" and the wing was able to increase its bombing effort in support of the 6th Division.

On its coastal advance during January, the 19th Brigade had moved at a steady pace, clearing its way against light opposition. Heavy rains which fell late in January flooded the coastal rivers, particularly the Danmap, destroying bridges, causing loss of lives by drowning and temporarily halting the advance. Because of the destruction of the bridges, supplies had to be brought forward by landing craft to Dogreto Bay. This flooding also adversely affected units of No. 71 Wing at Aitape, where roads became impassable.

Late in January the 19th Brigade was relieved by the 16th. Soon after the relief the 2/1st Battalion of this brigade patrolled along the coast as far as the north-west slope of Nambut Hill, where it clashed with the enemy. On the night of 29th-30th January a strong enemy attack on an Australian position on the north-western slope of this hill was repulsed. The Australians then made an attack on the enemy positions on the hill on 4th February, but they, in turn, were repulsed.

The 6th Division called for air support. On 5th February eight Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Hall,[7] bombed the hill after the infantry had indicated the target with smoke bombs. Next day Boomerangs of No. 4 Squadron bombed and strafed the enemy positions and the following day Beauforts from Nos. 7 and 8 Squadrons attacked. After these air attacks, the infantry advanced and captured two enemy positions on the north-west slopes.

A total of more than 100 sorties were flown by the Beauforts in support of the 6th Division during their operations against Nambut. In the latter stages of the attacks, the Beauforts, using 500-lb bombs with rod extensions, were bombing on mortar smoke indications laid only 150 yards from the ground troops. The infantry made a surprise attack on 16th February against the highest point on the hill and were successful. After further air strikes by Nos. 7 and 8 Squadrons, two more enemy positions were captured and by 19th February Nambut Hill was clear. The coastal advance, which at this time had reached Wank Creek, could now be continued. Against minor resistance the 2/2nd Battalion occupied positions on the But airfield on 16th March and, by the 19th, the But area was clear of the enemy.

To the south the 17th Brigade had been given the task of capturing Maprik and continuing the advance to the east. The main enemy force was at Maprik, but farther south were many isolated parties in prepared defensive positions based on gardens. By 8th February the 17th Brigade had cleared all the Balif villages, almost without opposition. A small

[7] W Cdr O. B. Hall, DFC, AFC, 260239. 6 Sqn; comd 34 Sqn 1943, 8 Sqn 1945. Airline pilot; of Bellevue Hill, NSW; b. 18 Jun 1908.

airfield was prepared at Balif for Auster aircraft which were then used to move wounded to Aitape. Beyond Balif patrols met strong enemy opposition and the army called on No. 71 Wing for frequent air strikes. The general advance on Maprik began on 8th March. Moving southwards from the Balif area, the ground forces occupied Balangabadabil, Asimbi, Ilahop and Asanakor.

Meanwhile, No. 71 Wing had turned the major part of its Beaufort strikes against the Japanese defence positions west and north of Maprik. All three Beaufort squadrons took part. The enemy replied feebly with light anti-aircraft and small arms fire.

On 13th March a Beaufort of No. 100 Squadron (captained by Flight Lieutenant Fowler[8]) exploded in mid-air over a target at Maprik West, killing the entire crew. Six Beauforts led by Wing Commander Conaghan, commanding officer of No. 100 Squadron, were in the strike and Fowler's aircraft was seen to explode as it released its bombs. Three days later Conaghan led six more Beauforts on a strike and another aircraft, captained by Squadron Leader Dey,[9] blew up in similar circumstances over the target.

Because of this second accident, a flight of No. 8 Squadron Beauforts out on a mission was ordered not to drop its bombs. No further bombs were to be carried by No. 71 Wing until an investigation by a committee of experts. The committee came to the conclusion, after carrying out flying tests in aircraft carrying bombs and components, that the tail unit of 100-lb bombs was weak and did not correctly perform the function of arming the tail pistol. As a result, this type of tail pistol was withdrawn from service for modification, and the wing resumed bombing operations on 26th March.[1] On that day the three Beaufort squadrons combined in a maximum strike on the Japanese mountain defences in the Maprik area.

In April 1945 No. 71 Wing continued its bombing onslaught on enemy-held villages in the Maprik area. On 3rd April eight Beauforts of No. 8 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Fryar,[2] bombed and strafed villages half a mile west of Maprik. On the same day three Beauforts of No. 7 Squadron bombed in the same area.

On the 10th, 11th and 12th April all three Beaufort squadrons of the wing were bombing and strafing around Maprik. On 22nd April thirty-three Beauforts from the wing combined in a three-squadron strike on a Japanese headquarters four miles east of Maprik. No. 100 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Conaghan, attacked first with ten Beauforts which dropped bombs on and strafed the target. One of the ten aircraft

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[8] F-Lt H. J. Fowler, 415636. 14 and 100 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Kalgoorlie, WA; b. Subiaco, WA, 10 Sep 1921. Killed in action 13 Mar 1945.

[9] Sqn Ldr P. A. Dey, 402853. 456 Sqn, 276 Sqn RAF, and 100 Sqn. Audit clerk; of North Sydney, NSW; b. North Sydney, 13 Jun 1921. Killed in action 16 Mar 1945.

[1] No. 100 Sqn lost another two Beauforts in a mid-air collision on 2 April, shortly after the aircraft had taken off on a bombing mission. The aircraft, which crashed into the sea, were piloted by F-Lt's I. H. Fielding (of Mentone, Vic) and E. E. Crisp (Boulder, WA). W Cdr Conaghan, who was leading the mission, ordered the remaining aircraft to return to base. Searches were made but, although wreckage was found, there was no sign of any survivor.

[2] F-Lt B. E. Fryar, 417172. 32 and 8 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Rose Park, SA; b. Rose Park, 14 Aug 1922.

was piloted by Group Captain Hancock, who on 1st April had assumed command of No. 71 Wing from Wing Commander Cooper. Then Nos. 7 (Wing Commander Barton[3]) and 8 (Wing Commander Hall) attacked the target. After bombing, the Beauforts strafed the area. The strike was later reported by the army to be successful.

The final ground attack on the Maprik villages was made by the 2/7th Battalion, and by 21st April they had been cleared of the enemy, who began to withdraw in the north. This withdrawal was followed up by the 2/6th Battalion and, by 24th April, the Japanese had been cleared from the western banks of the Screw River. Up to this time a total of 539 Japanese had been killed while the Australian losses had been 31 killed and 73 wounded.

At the end of April the advance continued in the coastal area. It was expected that enemy opposition would be strong, but in fact it was weak and this drive made rapid progress. With little ground opposition there were few calls from the army for close-support air strikes, so that the Beauforts were engaged in strikes well ahead of the advance. They bombed heavily at Brandi Plantation, Cape Moem, Kairiru Island, Cape Wom and Boram.

The condition of the Japanese soldiers became progressively more wretched. The extremely crude diet and illness greatly lowered their strength and the hopelessness of their position lowered their morale. There were cases of insubordination, murder and stealing, chiefly of food. There were some who even surrendered to the Australians.

On 30th April General Blamey, at a conference with senior officers at Lae, approved a detailed plan for the capture of Wewak and the destruction of the Wewak garrison. The plan included heavy air strikes by the R.A.A.F. and the Combat Replacement and Training Centre. The 19th Brigade would seize and occupy Cape Wom and Yarabos, secure the flank at Ranimboa, and then destroy the enemy in the Wewak Point-Cape Moem area and capture Sauri village. In order that the enemy would not escape to the east "Farida Force", composed of the 2/6th Cavalry Regiment with supporting arms, was to land at the eastern end of Dove Bay, establish a beach-head and cut the Wewak-Forok road.

The squadrons at the disposal of No. 71 Wing were given the task of "softening up" targets at each objective area and of achieving their maximum operational effort on D-day (11th May), in support of the amphibious operation at Dove Bay and the simultaneous advance of the troops moving along the coast to Wewak. To increase the striking power of the wing, detachments from Nos. 6 and 15 Beaufort Squadrons were added to No. 71 Wing. A detachment of six Beauforts from No. 6 Squadron under Wing Commander Waddy had arrived at Tadji on 28th April, while another eight aircraft from No. 15 Squadron, under Group Captain Primrose, reached Tadji on 4th May. They were to serve under No. 71 Wing until 11th May.

[3] W Cdr J. O. F. Barton, 266. 7 Sqn; comd 32 Sqn 1944, 7 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Scone, NSW; b. London, 3 Apr 1918.

Group Captain Hancock called his squadron commanders together and told them that it was necessary to cut down on current operations so as to conserve fuel, bombs, supplies, and get as many as possible of the Beauforts serviceable in preparation for the offensive. From time to time there had been heavy anti-aircraft fire from the Wewak area and since close-support operations would be flown at a low level, there was a possibility of losses from enemy anti-aircraft fire. The 19th Brigade was to advance along the coast from the mouth of the Hawain River, towards Wewak. This move would begin on 3rd May. Before and during the offensive air support was to be on an imposing scale.

On 1st May three squadrons of Beauforts (Nos. 6, 8 and 100) bombed on the route of the advance at Cape Wom and Brandi Plantation. On the following day Nos. 6 and 7 Squadrons, using seventeen Beauforts, struck at Cape Pus, where they hit gun emplacements, while No. 8 Squadron again bombed Brandi Plantation. Next day (3rd May) No. 7 Squadron was detailed to destroy an enemy pill-box one mile and a half south of Cape Pus. The strike was led in by Flight Lieutenant Tutt[4] and bombs from three of the Beauforts straddled the target while others fell harmlessly in the sea. Other Beauforts this day bombed Cape Wom, Brandi and a village on Kairiru Island.

After the air attack on Cape Pus of 3rd May, the 2/4th Battalion of the 19th Brigade began the advance. The men occupied Cape Pus without meeting enemy resistance. The following day, after a strike by twenty-nine Beauforts, the 2/4th occupied Cape Wom and the stage was set for the attack on Wewak itself.

On the morning of 5th May the Beauforts struck at the northern quarter of Wewak Peninsula, bombing dug-in positions. Others hit Cape Moem and Muschu Island. On the following day Tutt led a strike of Beauforts from No. 7 Squadron against what was believed to be the headquarters of a Japanese general, while others continued the bombardment of Wewak Peninsula.

As D-day approached the bombardment by the Beauforts increased and, on the morning of 9th May, 50 Beauforts were concentrated on Sauri village and Sauri Hill, and another 57 struck on the neck of Wewak Peninsula later in the day. The Beauforts were from all five squadrons, and in addition two Boomerang aircraft of No. 5 Squadron strafed targets of opportunity. All aircraft engaged in these operations hit the allotted areas. Some of the explosions caused numerous landslides, which buried enemy soldiers in underground tunnels and passages constructed in cliff faces along the shoreline.

On 8th May twelve Beauforts of Nos. 15 and 100 Squadrons had carried out further bombardments on Wewak Peninsula, after which the 2/4th Battalion, supported by tanks, advanced to within a mile of Wewak Point, where it engaged and overcame strongly-built enemy defences. On 9th May the efforts of No. 71 Wing reached a peak with 109 bombing and

[4] F-Lt A. F. Tutt, DFC, 400108. 12, 24, 82, 1 and 7 Sqns. Store assistant; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Palmerston North, NZ, 14 Feb 1915.

strafing sorties, of which 107 were flown by the Beauforts and two by Boomerangs of No. 5 Squadron. This effort was supplemented by C.R.T.C. aircraft which struck heavily at gun positions on Cape Moem with 12 heavy bombers, 12 mediums and 12 fighters.

On 10th May forty-five Beauforts were employed on a triangular area enclosing known gun positions near the Wirui plantation, destroying at least one 75-mm gun and blowing up a fuel dump. On the same day twenty Beauforts in two formations, led by Hall and Waddy, struck at gun positions on a ridge near the Boram airfield. It was a five-gun position which had been a target for bombing for eighteen months, in spite of which it occasionally fired on Allied aircraft. (When the ground troops reached the position some days later, only one gun was standing.)

After the Beaufort attacks on 10th May the 2/4th Battalion attacked again with tank support in heavy rain. The enemy resisted, but within two hours and a half most of the Wewak Peninsula was in the battalion's hands, with the remnant of the enemy holed-up in caves and pill-boxes in the north-eastern corner, from which they were cleared the following day.

Farida Force had been ordered to land at Dove Bay on 11th May, for the purpose (the reader will recall) of cutting off the enemy from escape to the east. No. 71 Wing had prepared a force of more than sixty Beauforts and Boomerangs to assist the landing. Of these, thirteen from No. 7 Squadron were placed on air alert and would be called on to carry out any tasks which became necessary during the operations. The remaining Beauforts from the other four squadrons were to carry out pre-arranged strikes on enemy positions and huts on a ridge 1,000 feet high, commanding the landing beach area. These Beauforts began taking off from Tadji at dawn, but, owing to low cloud, rain and poor visibility, only nine of them were able to see the target, which they bombed, destroying five huts. Of the remaining Beauforts, fifteen from No. 100 Squadron and seven from No. 8 Squadron bombed the coastline near the Brandi Plantation. Another eight from No. 15 Squadron attacked Forok village, while eight from No. 6 dropped bombs on Kaiep village, demolishing eleven huts.

The assault troops were transported from But in two corvettes, and five miles out from Dove Bay they were transferred to landing craft. Before the landing the cruisers H.M.A.S. *Hobart* and H.M.S. *Newfoundland,* the Australian destroyers *Arunta* and *Warramunga,* and the sloop *Swan* carried out a naval bombardment which was directed by pilots of No. 5 Squadron (Flying Officers Syle[5] and Kidman). At 8.30 a.m., when the bombardment had ended, Farida Force landed and quickly secured a beach-head against negligible opposition. Only one man was wounded. Shortly after the landing the Air Coordinator (Flight Lieutenant Tutt) called for seven aircraft of the air alert squadron to attack a hill feature which was believed to have enemy defence positions overlooking the

[5] F-O G. A. Syle, 431339; 5 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Oakleigh, Vic; b. Oakleigh, 18 Apr 1925. Died of illness 15 Aug 1945.

beach-head. The remaining six aircraft were rapidly concentrated on a target of opportunity—an enemy force moving away from the coast—and they successfully bombed this enemy force within four minutes of the first sighting. By the time these attacks had been carried out, Beauforts from Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons, which had bombed earlier in the morning, had returned to base, refuelled and rearmed, and a force of twelve machines had relieved No. 7 Squadron on air alert over the beach-head.

Next day eight Beauforts from No. 15 Squadron dropped eight tons of bombs on enemy positions half a mile south of Brandi Plantation, and twelve from No. 8 Squadron attacked targets in the same area. On 14th May twenty-one Beauforts from Nos. 8 and 100 Squadrons attacked enemy positions at Kumbungua (east of Maprik), destroying thirteen huts.

To the end of May a total of 1,458 sorties were flown in support of the advancing Australian troops. The total of bombs dropped by these aircraft was 1,236 tons. There was a continued shortage of bombs in the area and at the end of May the position had become acute. Not only did the shortage cause a curtailment of effort, but many bombs proved defective. Hancock wrote in his tactical appreciation for June 1945: "The shortage of bombs and ammunition has been very acute, stocks reaching the lowest level for the past seven months. Effort has been reduced to a fraction of our capacity, and confined to targets of vital importance only." To overcome the shortage the wing used Japanese bombs in considerable numbers, but unfortunately only about 60 per cent of these were effective. A shortage of fuel aggravated the situation. Hancock in July reported:

> We have, at the moment, sufficient stocks for only three days operations with no prospect of early replenishment. Unless our effort is once more to be restricted, ample provision should be made immediately, and at least one month's reserves built up.

In the ground fighting at Wewak there was little more than mopping up to be done after the landing on 11th May at Dove Bay, and by 13th May the 6th Division had completed the occupation of the Wewak area. By 16th May it had occupied Cape Boram and a week later it controlled Cape Moem. On 23rd May the junction of the Wewak and Dove Bay forces took place on the coast at Brandi Plantation.

It was obvious that the enemy had withdrawn his main body inland towards the mountains, leaving a comparatively small force to defend the coastal sector. As the Australians advanced inland resistance stiffened, and it seemed likely that the enemy intended to make a big effort to defend high ground along the tracks leading inland. This proved to be so. Between 22nd June and the early part of July 1945 units of the 6th Division fought a bitter battle to capture Mt Tazaki and Mt Shiburangu, which were a few miles inland from Wewak and dominated the entire sector. The enemy was strongly entrenched and in a position to block the movement of the Australians along the tracks leading to Numoikum and Passam villages.

In June the Beauforts bombed dozens of enemy-held villages and positions both in the Wewak sector and inland. The enemy was being compressed into a smaller and smaller area and the intensity of the air bombardment was becoming greater.

Mt Tazaki fell to the 2/4th Battalion on 22nd June. The 2/8th Battalion had been assigned the task of taking Mt Shiburangu and on 16th June, after supporting bombardment by Beauforts of Nos. 7 and 100 Squadrons the battalion attacked a position, "Hill 2", a half-mile north of this feature. After a five-hour fight the battalion took Hill 2. No. 71 Wing was now called on for a heavy strike on Mt Shiburangu. Hancock assigned his three Beaufort squadrons to attack positions on the mountain on 26th June. Hancock, at the controls of a Beaufort, joined No. 7 Squadron in the attack, which began at 8.10 a.m. Some of the bombs dropped by this squadron had been captured from the Japanese and failed to explode, but all the others landed just north of the point where the mortar smoke bombs exploded. No. 100 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Dewar,[6] was next over the target at 8.20 a.m., followed by No. 8 Squadron led by Hall. No. 8 Squadron dropped 1,000-lb bombs on top of the ridge indicated by the mortar smoke. They also dropped Japanese bombs, most of which failed to explode. One bomb hung up in one of the Beauforts, but this was later jettisoned on Kairiru Island. Next day all three Beaufort squadrons bombed again, on the same target. Again, some of the bombs failed to explode, but those that did were mainly on the target.

Covered by these heavy air strikes and by constant fire from batteries of artillery, the 2/8th Battalion attacked. After four hours fighting against stiff resistance, Mt Shiburangu fell. By 5th July patrols of the 2/8th Battalion linked up with the 2/4th Battalion moving from Mt Tazaki. Thus the whole of the militarily-important high ground running from Sauri village, through Mt Shiburangu to Mt Tazaki was under Australian control, making Wewak safe and opening the way for a drive to the south. By 7th August the 16th Brigade, which had relieved the 19th Brigade on 29th July, had cleared the Numoikum villages after determined enemy resistance.

Meanwhile, the 17th Brigade had managed to gain a strong foothold among the Yamil group of villages, six miles east of Maprik. By 1st July all villages of the Yamil group had fallen and the 17th Brigade began a drive on Kaboibus which was captured on 2nd August. The improvement in the supply situation in July had permitted a wide outflanking movement which resulted in the capture of Kiarivu on 9th August by the 2/7th Battalion.

The last strike by No. 71 Wing was against a village target in the Kiarivu area. News of the surrender arrived on the morning of 15th August, just after the Beauforts had made their attack. A total of thirty Beauforts from Nos. 7, 8 and 100 Squadrons took part. Immediately

[6] Sqn Ldr J. S. C. Dewar, 290613. 14 and 6 Sqns; comd 100 Sqn 1945. Barrister and solicitor; of Perth; b. Perth, 24 Mar 1911.

after they had completed the strike, the senior controller reported over the radio-telephone: "The following signal has just been received from Command Headquarters in plain language: 'Emergency immediate—Cancel all operations against enemy forthwith including missions now airborne.' "

For several days after the end of the fighting, aircraft of No. 71 Wing were engaged in dropping surrender leaflets to the Japanese forces informing them of the capitulation.

The Japanese situation after the fall of Kaboibus had become extremely critical and, on 30th July, General Adachi had issued an operations order to the remnants of his three divisions, calling for a "last stand" at Numbogua, where the army was "to die in honourable defeat". The enemy had been greatly troubled by natives friendly to the Australians, who had sent information about the Japanese, with the result (the Japanese reported) that "enemy planes bombarded every new location established for headquarters". A Japanese colonel (Shibazaki) said, some time after the fighting had ended, that the Australians showed much kindness towards them, which was much more than they had expected.

CHAPTER 21

# ANTI-SUBMARINE PATROLS 1944-45

ENEMY submarines sank no Allied shipping off Australia in late 1943 and the early weeks of 1944. On the 12th February 1944, therefore, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock issued an operations instruction[1] ordering a reduction in anti-submarine air patrols flown by R.A.A.F. aircraft. Close escort of shipping during daylight hours was to be given only in waters north of the 24th parallel of latitude. Hitherto R.A.A.F. squadrons had given close air escort in areas north of the 32nd parallel. In water south of the 24th parallel, air officers commanding were given power to declare temporary "areas of probability" or to order standing patrols "in the vicinity of focal points or along shipping routes as the situation requires".

Two months later, in April 1944, there were still no indications of enemy submarine activity, and Bostock ordered further reductions in close escort. This kind of protection would now only be given along the shipping routes between Darwin and Thursday Island and in the waters of the Solomon Sea to the north of 11 degrees south latitude.

Even with these reductions, squadrons engaged in anti-submarine patrols were finding it difficult to meet their commitments. They were overstraining their maintenance and too much of their effort was going into patrolling and too little into the training of crews for squadrons engaged in the forward battle areas. However, with still further reductions in patrol requirements, the situation eased, and, in July 1944, two reserve squadrons, Nos. 71 and 73, were released from anti-submarine patrol work and declared non-operational.

The success of the offensive, which was taking the war farther and farther from Australia, and the lack of enemy submarines off the Australian coast, had led to a slackening which was deplored by Air Commodore Charlesworth, Air Officer Commanding, Eastern Area. He reported: "It is apparent that both the Navy and merchant ships are fairly complacent about the submarine risk in Eastern Area waters. This has resulted in a general slackening off in procedure; ships are seldom where they should be, and a minority of merchant ships identify themselves to aircraft. . . ." However, on the 20th September 1944, organisations concerned with the protection of shipping from submarine attack were placed on the alert again when they were warned that German submarines might appear in Australian waters "in the near future". It was expected that they would operate off Fremantle, but their range was such that they could operate along shipping routes within the boundaries of Southern and Eastern Areas.

In mid-1944 Patrol Air Wing 10 of the United States Navy was withdrawn from its base at Crawley, near Perth, from which it had operated since 1942. As a result of this move, Western Area after July 1944 was

[1] No. 17/1944.

unable to maintain long-range reconnaissance. The withdrawal of the Americans placed additional burdens on the R.A.A.F. in Western Area and much of the extra work was carried out by the Beaufort crews of No. 14 Squadron. When the reports of the possibility of German submarines operating off Australia came through, No. 14 Squadron was called on to provide special patrols because it was believed that the Germans might attack Allied submarines operating in the exercise area and proceeding to and from base at Fremantle. The special patrols required 22 hours flying daily by the squadron and it was found necessary to withdraw detachments from Pinjarra and Learmonth in order to maintain this effort. In October the patrols were reduced again, but doubled in December, when a German submarine attacked off the South Australian coast.

This submarine attacked the Greek motor vessel *Illosis* on 9th December. The vessel was steaming through a haze off Kingston in the south-east of South Australia, when, at 2.15 p.m. it encountered the submarine. Apparently surprised in the haze, the submarine fired four shots in quick succession, one falling twenty yards astern, one flying overhead, while the other two were wide. A few seconds later, before its nationality could be determined, the submarine crash-dived.

Radio signals quickly brought R.A.A.F. planes to the scene and searches were ordered by Southern Area. Beauforts of No. 1 Operational Training Unit, East Sale, and Ansons and Beaufighters from Laverton hunted exhaustively but failed to find the enemy submarine. The submarine concerned was *U.862,* commanded by Korvettenkapitan Heinrich Timm. On this occasion, the U-boat was frustrated in its attempt to sink the *Illosis* by the arrival of R.A.A.F. aircraft.[2]

It was calculated that the submarine which fired on the *Illosis* could be in Eastern Area waters by 11th December, and on that day Eastern Area patrols were altered to cover Sugarloaf Point to Bateman's Bay and forty miles to seaward. By 14th December a careful watch was being kept in the Brisbane area in case the submarine appeared there.

Eastern and Southern Areas were therefore on the alert when, on 25th December, an American Liberty ship, *Robert J. Walker,* was attacked off Moruya, just outside the southernmost extremity of the then covered area. *U.862* attacked with torpedoes, the first of which damaged the *Robert J. Walker* amidships. The second was exploded by gun fire. After the third struck, at 5.58 a.m., the vessel was abandoned. A Beaufort of No. 15 Squadron, based at Camden, arrived over the ship at 6.8 a.m., ten minutes after the last and fatal torpedo had struck home.

The first intimation of the submarine attack had arrived in the form of a signal from the vessel to the navy which was sent at 2.52 a.m. It was not until some thirty minutes later that the navy advised the R.A.A.F. Air Operations Room. The R.A.A.F. ordered No. 15 Squadron to increase its stand-by to three aircraft and shortly afterwards Rathmines was ordered to send its stand-by aircraft to the scene of the attack.

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[2] This information is contained in a captured German Naval Staff Diary.

Some weeks later the United States Liaison Office in Sydney asked for "particulars in connection with the delay in the dispatch of the aircraft" to cover the *Robert J. Walker,* and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock in a letter to General Kenney pointed out that the total time from receipt of information about the ship in Eastern Area until the first aircraft was airborne was 91 minutes. "After considering all circumstances and allowing for the time taken to brief the aircrew fully for the operation," he wrote, "I do not consider this delay excessive." He asked that the information should be forwarded to the Commander, Allied Naval Forces.

The first Beaufort to find the ship reported that it was sinking and that the crew had taken to the life-boats. Air crews watched over the life-boats constantly, until the survivors were picked up by naval vessels some twenty-four hours later.

On 25th-26th December five Beauforts of No. 32 Squadron, Lowood; three Catalinas of No. 11 Squadron, Rathmines; and five Kingfisher aircraft of No. 107 Squadron, also from Rathmines, carried out searches for the enemy submarine without result. A Kingfisher reported seeing a "cigar-shaped object" on 26th December, but the captain of the aircraft did not consider it was a submarine and did not therefore drop depth-charges. On 27th-28th December eighteen aircraft continued the search and one of these, a Beaufort, captained by Flying Officer Stone,[3] was lost soon after take-off from Lowood.

Searches were continued until 4th January 1945, by which time a total of 1,128 day and night search hours had been flown. During the whole period, odd, but not strongly reliable, sightings were reported and depth-charges were dropped on two occasions, once by a Kingfisher and once by a Catalina.

The presence of an enemy submarine, perhaps more than one, in Australian waters, coupled with the fact that the British Pacific Fleet was to move to its base in Sydney before operating against the Japanese to the north, pointed to the need for anti-submarine defences to be constantly alert. Following the attack on the *Robert J. Walker,* Bostock reviewed R.A.A.F. policy for the air protection of shipping "to determine the manner in which available air forces may best be employed to counter any future attacks". On 3rd January 1945 he wrote on the subject to the Air Officers Commanding Eastern, Southern and Western Commands. "As far as can be foreseen at the moment," he said, "enemy submarine activity in Australian waters must be limited to sporadic raids only. This leads to consideration of the aim which the enemy may hope to achieve by his effort. In my opinion, this is likely to be two-fold—firstly, to attack and sink specially important ships, the movements of which have become known to the enemy through Intelligence sources; and secondly to create considerable nuisance value. In either case I feel that, apart from any material damage which he may inflict on our shipping, the enemy hopes to induce us to withdraw naval and air effort from forward to rear areas."

[3] F-O A. R. H. Stone, 412039. 13 and 32 Sqns. Clerk; of Bondi, NSW; b. Duntroon, ACT, 11 Oct 1916. Killed in action 27 Dec 1944.

Ships of "special importance" which it was thought likely that the German submarines would attempt to sink were classified in an R.A.A.F. Command Operation Instruction[4] of 11th January 1945 as: aircraft carriers and capital ships; troopships carrying more than 2,000 troops; naval auxiliaries and other ships which in the opinion of the Area Commander concerned, fell into the category of "specially important".

Force "Aintree", consisting of H.M.S. *Achilles* (escort) and the *Rimutaka,* carrying the Governor-General of Australia (H.R.H. the Duke of Gloucester) and members of his staff, entered Eastern Area waters in January 1945. This convoy came within the category of ships of "special importance", but unfortunately a Catalina which was assigned to cover the convoy on 27th January, as it entered Eastern Area, could not find it. The Catalina was still searching for the convoy at 10 p.m. when its radar became unserviceable. The relief Catalina took up the search but at 3 a.m. next morning it also reported that its radar was unserviceable. As a result of this double failure the convoy was without close escort during the night. Bostock, when he learned of this incident, directed that the radar maintenance in No. 11 Squadron should be investigated.

On 6th February *U.862* struck again, this time in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Western Australia. It torpedoed the motor vessel *Peter Silvester* at 2.40 p.m. 800 miles from Fremantle on a bearing of 259 degrees. The vessel was then on a north-westerly course en route from Melbourne to Colombo. It was hit by six torpedoes, the third and fourth of which struck home about forty minutes after the first two. The vessel broke in half forward of the bridge, the stern portion remaining afloat while the part forward of the bridge sank. There had been no warning of the attack. After the torpedoes had struck the ship the submarine surfaced about 400 yards away.

Four days later the Royal Australian Navy received a signal from the motor vessel *Cape Edmont* that it had picked up fifteen survivors from the *Peter Silvester* at dawn on 9th February. The Navy informed Western Area and a search for survivors was carried out by Liberators of No. 25 Squadron and two Catalinas of No. 205 Squadron R.A.F.

One of the Liberators sighted twenty survivors on rafts and dropped rations and a "Gibson girl" (emergency radio transmitter). The aircraft remained airborne for sixteen hours and a half, and during the search visibility was limited to two miles with a ceiling of 500 feet. The survivors sighted were on two rafts lashed together.

On 13th February another Liberator sighted two rafts containing at least nineteen survivors and one life-boat with eleven survivors. The Liberator remained in the area for forty minutes and, after dropping supplies, it guided the American vessel *Corpus Christi* to the craft, and these survivors were rescued. The following day one of the two No. 25 Squadron Liberators detailed to search east of the original area of the sinking of the *Peter Silvester* crashed and burned while taking off. Five of the crew were killed but the remainder escaped with slight shock and abrasions.

[4] No. 14/1945.

On 28th February (twenty-two days after the submarine attack), a life-boat with twenty survivors from the *Peter Silvester* was picked up by H.M.S. *Activity* some 580 miles from the position of the sinking. Thirty-two days after the attack the last remaining life-boat, with fifteen survivors, was found by an American submarine, twenty miles west of Vlamingh Head light, North-West Cape. This life-boat, under sail, had drifted 1,100 miles in a north-westerly direction before being found. The occupants had been out of food for several days but still had sufficient water. A final reckoning revealed that a total of 143 people from six rafts and four life-boats had been rescued. Between 24 and 34 were posted missing, believed killed, by the torpedo explosions or from drowning when the forward part of the vessel went down.

Crews of searching Liberators stated that a metal mirror with sighting hole was the most effective means of attracting their attention. An officer of the *Peter Silvester,* describing the use of the mirror, said: "On Tuesday, 13th February, we sighted an aeroplane. It was just a pin-point. It circled around for half an hour. We got out a metal mirror with a hole in the centre and kept it on the aeroplane. The aeroplane flew directly over us and then circled and dropped supplies. We got a supply of two breakfast units, two dinner units . . . the aeroplane came back and dropped a box. We could not recover it." (It was explained later that the box contained an automatic radio transmitter.)

The sinking of the *Peter Silvester* and the subsequent rescue of most of its complement was the last incident in the submarine war off the Australian coast. Anti-submarine air patrols continued until the end of the war, although on a reduced scale. Routine anti-submarine patrols by No. 14 Squadron in Western Area were discontinued after 23rd May 1945. However, Bostock warned Western Area that, although the European war was over, a number of U-boats was known to be in the Indian Ocean and, while they were still at large, there was a possibility they would continue to operate until their resources gave out. Therefore it was desirable that No. 14 Squadron should be immediately available to take up its duties of shipping protection.

Southern Area was finding it difficult to meet its air cover commitment and the Air Officer Commanding (Group Captain C. Eaton) blamed the lack of accurate information concerning the apparent alteration of course and speed of ships after leaving Western Area. "The greatest trouble," he wrote in his Tactical Appreciation for April 1945, "is experienced with units of the British Pacific Fleet, which at times have been sighted by aircraft between Mallacoota and Yanakie, up to 260 miles ahead of datum. This is the main reason for the forces not being met and also a great wasting of aircraft hours."

It was disconcerting for aircrews to have to fly over many miles of water looking for shipping which was not there. Bostock took the matter up with the British Pacific Fleet Headquarters and asked for better intelligence about ships' movements. The view of the British Pacific Fleet, however, was that the submarine risk at this stage of the war (June 1945) was

small. "It is therefore suggested for consideration," wrote the Admiral to the Commander, South-West Pacific Sea Frontier Force, "that A/S escort may not be in fact necessary, except in the case of movements of the most important B.P.F. Units, and then only if incapable of providing their own Air Patrols." The R.A.N. promised that, in case of necessity, where the provision of air cover was required, instructions would be issued to the ships concerned to enable a more satisfactory plotted position to be maintained. On 9th August, however, the R.A.N. advised Air Vice-Marshal Bostock that it was closing down the war ship plots at air operations rooms and withdrawing personnel. The following week the war ended.

CHAPTER 22

# MINELAYING BY THE CATALINAS

IN January 1943, at the Casablanca conference, President Roosevelt had observed that submarines in the first year of the Pacific war had sunk 1,000,000 tons of Japanese merchant marine and that "attrition of Japanese shipping was one of the best means of victory".[1] The enemy had lost severely and each additional ship sunk would now do him proportionately more injury than earlier when he had ample shipping for his needs. Furthermore, Japanese shipyards could not hope to replace ships at the rate they were being sunk. Also enemy anti-submarine measures were not of high standard.

The effect of shipping losses on the Japanese war economy would be great because of Japan's dependence on imported raw materials such as iron ore, coal, aluminium and oil.

American submarines, in addition to attacking enemy ships with torpedoes and shell fire, had been laying minefields in enemy waters. Task Force 71, commanded by Rear-Admiral Charles A. Lockwood, had sent submarines out on patrols from Fremantle in Western Australia for this purpose. Between October 1942 and April 1943 they laid 207 mines in the South China Sea, about the Philippines and along the Borneo coast. However, minelaying operations were unpopular with the submarine crews because they involved going into shoal waters where the submarines would be almost helpless if seen and attacked.[2] In the summer of 1942-43, however, there had been a critical shortage of torpedoes and Admiral Lockwood had been forced to substitute mines when a full allowance of torpedoes could not be made.

Aircraft were next pressed into service to lay mines. American marine and naval aircraft were used in March 1943 to lay mines in the Buin-Tonolei area in southern Bougainville, while Flying Fortresses and Liberators carried out diversionary bombing on Kahili airfield.

Evidently requests were made to General MacArthur that he should allot some of his air effort to minelaying operations. However, he had then informed Admiral Nimitz that he could not spare bombers for minelaying when "more direct action promised greater returns".[3] Australian Catalinas were then offered for this work. Although slow, the range over which they could operate (up to 2,000 miles) and the load which they could carry at this range, made the Catalina ideally suited for minelaying. In addition, the aircraft were fitted with torpedo racks which could carry both American and British mines.[4]

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[1] After the war it was discovered that, in fact, up to the end of 1942, some 600,000 tons of Japanese shipping had been sunk by submarines, while air attack, mines and other agents brought the total to more than 1,000,000 tons.

[2] S. E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, Vol VI, p. 76.

[3] Memo, MacArthur to C-in-C US Pacific Fleet, Honolulu, 1 Jan 1943.

[4] Reference to minelaying by these aircraft has been made in earlier chapters.

There were in the R.A.A.F. a number of officers who had served in Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force in Britain and had been impressed by the results of mining campaigns against shipping about the coasts of France and Norway. Minelaying had proved to be a most profitable and economical form of attack against sea communications. The actual sinking and damaging of ships is only part of the strain which is imposed. The laying of mines results in the closing of harbours, dislocating sea communications and forcing the diversion of forces to minesweeping and other counter-measures. The closing of harbours is equivalent to an over-all reduction of the merchant shipping tonnage available to the enemy. There were, in the islands north of Australia, a number of harbours in the hands of the enemy which might be blockaded by mining.

On 29th March 1943 Air Vice-Marshal Bostock proposed to General Kenney that his Australian Catalinas should be used first of all to mine Wewak Harbour. Performance trials, however, showed that the Catalinas, loaded with mines, would not be able to cross the mountains of New Guinea to reach Wewak, and he therefore suggested, a few days later, that a more suitable harbour for the first mine-dropping operation would be Silver Sound, near Kavieng in New Ireland. Kavieng was an important intermediate anchorage between the Japanese Combined Fleet base at Truk and the major base of Rabaul. Bostock said in his letter that the United States naval authorities believed the anchorage was about to be developed by the enemy and suggested that it would be wise to have it mined before defences were built up. The enemy defences there were limited and it would therefore not be necessary to call on the Fifth Air Force to provide diversionary bombing attacks.

On 9th April, General MacArthur's headquarters approved the R.A.A.F. plan for planting eighteen mines in Silver Sound on the night of 22nd-23rd April and sixteen mines in the Ysabel Passage, on the night of 24th-25th April. R.A.A.F. Command then ordered North-Eastern Area to carry out the operation, defining its objects as:

1. To sink and damage enemy ships entering Silver Sound.
2. To deny the enemy the use of Silver Sound as a fleet anchorage or base, thus forcing him to use unprotected anchorages exposed to submarine attack, or alternatively to hinder the enemy's effort by making him divert men, equipment and ships from other employment to special minesweeping operations.

Four mine-warfare specialists were sent to Cairns, Queensland, the base of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons, to supervise the loading of mines and the briefing of crews according to the laying plan prepared by R.A.A.F. Command. They were: Lieut-Commander Carr,[5] R.A.N., Squadron Leader Engel,[6] Lieutenant C. E. McCalip of the United States Navy and Flying Officer Smooker.[7] No difficulties were experienced in loading. One load

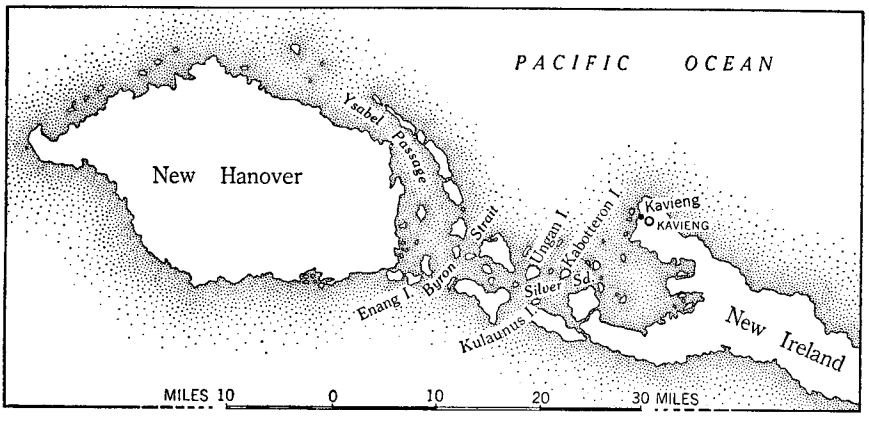
[5] Lt-Cdr P. E. Carr, DFC; RAN. HMAS *Perth* 1939-40; HMS *Hermes* (814 Sqn) 1941, 1942; HMAS *Australia* 1942. Of Toorak, Vic; b. Toorak, 25 Feb 1908.

[6] W Cdr N. P. Engel, 405. Stn Armament Offr, RAAF HQ Port Moresby 1941-42; Comd Armament Offr RAAF Command 1942-44. Regular air force offr; of Raymond Terrace, NSW; b. Raymond Terrace, 19 Jul 1920.

[7] W Cdr L. B. Smooker, 4843. Stn Armament Offr HQ Port Moresby 1942; Armament duties 9 Ops Gp 1942-43; LO USAAF Fwd Ech 1943. Regular airman; of Orbost, Vic; b. Orbost, 5 Feb 1914.

of two mines was taken by each of the two bomb scows[8] and eight aircraft were loaded.

It was thought best to carry out the operation in full moonlight and, to avoid collision in the laying area, aircraft having adjacent tracks were given widely spaced take-off times. Four of the Catalinas were directed to refuel at Milne Bay and four at Port Moresby on the return trip. The journey from Cairns to Milne Bay and thence to Silver Sound meant about ten hours flying, much of it at night over enemy territory.




Squadron Leader Vernon of No. 11 Squadron took off first on 22nd April at 11.10 p.m., and was followed by Wing Commander Green, Squadron Leader Stokes, Pilot Officer Blackley,[9] Flight Lieutenant Tamblyn,[1] Squadron Leader Stilling and Flight Lieutenants W. J. Clark and White.[2] On the way to Silver Sound the Catalinas had to fly through the dense rain clouds of two tropical storms, and at the target they were silhouetted in the light of the full moon.

Blackley was first to reach the area. He made one run and dropped both mines successfully from 300 feet. After leaving his datum point and before dropping the mines he touched the water but with no ill effects. The enemy was not alert to the presence of Allied aircraft and Blackley therefore met no opposition. A ship just east of Kulaunus Island signalled him with a green Aldis-type lamp.

Green dropped his mines two minutes after Blackley, from 900 feet. Anti-aircraft fire from Ungan Island burst closely behind him during his run. The third to drop mines was Vernon, who made his run in the

[8] A shallow draught tender used at seaplane bases between the shore and the aircraft at their moorings.

[9] F-Lt T. Blackley, 404901; 20 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Innisfail, Qld; b. Atherton, Qld, 4 Mar 1917.

[1] Sqn Ldr H. Tamblyn, DFC, 85697, RAF. 202 and 205 Sqns RAF; 20 Sqn. Clerk; of Five Dock, NSW; b. Concord, NSW, 12 Mar 1916.

[2] F-Lt W. G. S. White, DFC, 404192. 201 and 11 Sqns, and 113 ASR Flight. Newsagent; of Mackay, Qld; b. Mackay, 10 Feb 1913.

same area as Blackley. Both mines released correctly and Vernon continued his run over the ship which had signalled Blackley fifteen minutes earlier. This ship opened fire with medium and light anti-aircraft guns. Vernon's Catalina was holed five times by shrapnel in the port float, and enemy fire also blew four large holes in his port wing. He turned west and encountered more anti-aircraft fire from a ship to the west of Kulaunus Island. By the time White, in the last Catalina to lay mines, came over the target area the defences had a very good idea of the height and speed of the raiding aircraft. White encountered very accurate medium anti-aircraft fire from Ungan and Kabotteron Islands and was forced to turn to port to avoid it. He dropped his mines about 1,000 yards north of the planned position, but in good water.

Two nights later the second raid took place. Another approach to Silver Sound, through Byron Strait and Ysabel Passage, was mined. This time the weather was milder, only one front being passed. Only one of the Catalinas (captained by Flying Officer Marsh[3]) was fired on and then only after the Catalina had itself fired on a light anti-aircraft position on Enang Island. On 27th April, Flying Officers Shields[4] and Marsh flew again to Silver Sound to reinforce the minefield. However, the weather en route was very bad and in the dropping area heavy rain and low cloud prevented the aircraft from finding their datum point. Both returned to Cairns with their mines. The weather continued poor until the night of 3rd May when three Catalinas (Stokes, Marsh and Flying Officer Dowsley[5]) set off and had little trouble in laying six mines from 900 feet. There was no moon during this mission, yet the captains had no difficulty in finding their datum points. It was therefore concluded that it would be better to drop mines without the aid of the moon, because fighter interception would be less likely and with no moon a Catalina is difficult to see below 500 feet. There was a greater risk of collision because the aircraft could not see each other, but the risk could be avoided by sending fewer aircraft per night.

Some time elapsed before results could be assessed for this first Australian aerial minelaying mission, but, a few weeks later, the Seventh Fleet Intelligence officer received a reliable report that the Japanese were sweeping the minefield in the Kavieng area, but no casualties to enemy ships had been observed.

At the end of May, sixteen Catalina sorties were flown on a minelaying operation to the Admiralty Islands. The Catalinas laid their mines in Seeadler Harbour and the adjacent Lorengau anchorage. The Admiralties would provide the only suitable deep water anchorages for the Japanese fleet south of Truk, if Rabaul and Silver Sound could be effectively neutralised by bombing and mining. The operation was spread over

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[3] F-Lt P. L. B. Marsh, 408191. 9, 20 and 11 Sqns. Assistant manager; of Launceston, Tas; b. Wyong, NSW, 21 Sep 1916. Killed in aircraft accident 4 Feb 1944.

[4] F-Lt J. P. R. Shields, 402065. 210 Sqn RAF, 20 Sqn. Accountant; of Coogee, NSW; b. Richmond, NSW, 26 Sep 1918.

[5] F-Lt W. A. Dowsley, 408997. 9, 20 and 43 Sqns. Sales representative; of Toorak, Vic; b. Melbourne, 12 Jan 1917.

several nights and a total of thirty-five mines were laid. The pilots had to fly around for considerable periods searching for their starting points, but they were not fired on. In these circumstances, it was considered unnecessary for diversionary bombing raids to be made, since all they would do would be to stir up enemy opposition.

On 4th June 1943 an American submarine from Fremantle added twenty-four mines to the minefield at Kavieng and on 15th June Liberators of the Fifth Air Force joined the minelaying campaign and dropped twenty-four mines off the mouth of the Sepik River, for the purpose of hindering Japanese activities at Wewak and Aitape. On the nights of 10th-11th, 11th-12th and 14th-15th July, Australian Catalinas flew from Darwin to Babo on Maccluer Gulf to drop eleven mines. Rabaul's supply line was now affected from two directions. Ships from Truk would hazard themselves at Kavieng, while the other minefields would interfere with surface supply of the air route bases from the Netherlands East Indies through Kendari, Ceram, Babo and Wewak to Rabaul.

Minelaying continued to be only a minor activity of the Catalina squadrons. Both Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons had heavy commitments in anti-submarine work, supply of coastwatchers, and bombing. In addition, during July and August an unfortunate series of mishaps to aircraft on the water reduced considerably the number of aircraft available for the work.

On 29th July mines were laid in the channel between Ceram and Ceram Laut at Geser, and in early August the port of Macassar in Celebes was mined. Darwin was used by the Catalinas only as a refuelling and overnight resting place. It was still too much under threat of enemy air attack for permanent use. The Catalinas engaged on the Macassar operations took their mines aboard at Cairns and flew to Darwin on 3rd August. After refuelling, the aircraft took their mines to Macassar and returned to Darwin early on the 5th. On the 6th more fuel and fresh mines were placed on board and again the planes set off for Macassar. A total of sixteen mines were left in the approaches and harbour of Macassar.

Surabaya was the next target chosen. The harbour at Surabaya is covered by the island of Madura, a big protective wall lying along the north coast of Java. At Surabaya there were large naval dockyards and a highly-developed commercial port which handled a huge peacetime traffic in merchandise and raw materials. Mining the entrance roads might close the harbour and bottle up many ships using the port. The Japanese had been using Surabaya as the main supply and convoy assembly point for troopships moving to the military garrisons in islands closer to Australia. It also had a heavy concentration of anti-aircraft weapons.

Four Catalinas drawn from both Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons took part, captained by Green, Flight Lieutenants Bolitho, Miles[6] and Marsh. They left Cairns on 25th August and mined Surabaya on the night of 26th-27th August. No anti-aircraft fire was experienced. The four aircraft then

[6] F-Lt C. J. Miles, 405317. 11 and 20 Sqns. Public servant; of Brisbane; b. Stanthorpe, Qld, 19 Jan 1913. Killed in aircraft accident 7 Sep 1943.

returned to the U.S.S. *Preston* at Heron Haven, refuelled, and then continued to Darwin where they took on more mines and proceeded again to Surabaya. Again there was no anti-aircraft fire, although occasionally the crews could see searchlights flickering on and off. The track of the Catalinas lay over Madura Island and evidently crossed an encampment of enemy soldiery, for the aircraft were attacked at 3,000 feet with considerable small-arms fire from the ground. Miles' aircraft received seven bullet holes and a gunner one .30-calibre bullet in each leg.

On the night of 2nd September 1943 the R.A.A.F. lost its first Catalina on a mining mission. The aircraft, captained by Flying Officer Oliver,[7] vanished without trace after it took off to complete a minefield at Sorong in Dutch New Guinea. The most likely explanation was that the aircraft crashed on land, either in the mountains north-west of Fakfak or in the mountains of Nuhu Tjut Island. When this loss occurred the Catalinas had the laying of 235 mines to their credit.

On 26th September and again on 28th September three Catalinas mined Batu Kilat harbour and Pomelaa harbour and its approaches. The raid on Pomelaa revealed the presence there of an 8,000-ton vessel with an efficient anti-aircraft armament. The gunners opened up on Flight Lieutenant Lawrence's aircraft, scoring many hits, but it returned safely to base.

Two nights later a Catalina of No. 20 Squadron, captained by Stilling and carrying Lieut-Commander Carr as a passenger, set out from Darwin for the purpose of attacking this vessel with torpedoes. Stilling made the attack but was shot down over the target area. This was announced over the Japanese radio on 8th October. At 3 p.m. on 2nd October the call signals of the missing aircraft were heard at Perth for twelve minutes, but it was believed that these were broadcast by the enemy as a ruse to encourage Allied searching efforts. On the night of 3rd October Bolitho dropped eight 250-lb bombs on Pomelaa and searched the entire area and all escape points between Celebes and Darwin for the missing aircraft, but without result. A dozen or more aircraft searched the west and north coasts of Australia.

This misadventure dealt a severe blow to the progress of the mining campaign, because Carr, in close cooperation with the staff of the Seventh Fleet, had guided the aircraft mining campaign in the Netherlands East Indies from the beginning. He had a wide knowledge of the Netherlands East Indies and of minelaying problems and had worked hard and enthusiastically on the campaign. Carr survived the crash and was taken prisoner by the Japanese.

In November 1943 the Catalinas mined or reinforced existing minefields at Kendari, Ceram, Waingapu and Kavieng. In December the Catalinas were to mine Kau Bay, Halmahera Island. Seven Catalinas flew from Cairns to Darwin on 18th December, loaded with mines, but soon

[7] F-O J. P. Oliver, 401660. 9, 20 and 11 Sqns. Clerk; of "Paika" Stn, Balranald, NSW; b. Melbourne. 25 Aug 1915. Killed in action 2 Sep 1943.

after arrival there, a signal was received ordering them all to return to Cairns to take part in a ten-day bombing strike at Kavieng. This bombing would take place while ground forces of the South-West Pacific Area were on the way to and carrying out their assault at Cape Gloucester. It was not until 14th January 1944 that six Catalinas left Darwin for Kau Bay.

Kau Bay was undergoing rapid development by the Japanese. Earlier they had had few airfields there, but in January 1944 they were pushing ahead with the building of a powerful base. At Lolobata, within Kau Bay, reconnaissance showed thirteen ships, including two large destroyers. The original plan was to mine Kau Bay entrance first and thus trap all shipping in Kau Bay and then mine the anchorages. However, it was decided to attack the heavy concentration at Lolobata first, as an element of safety, for the crews.

To reach Kau Bay the Catalinas would have to spend at least five daylight hours flying over enemy-held islands. A proposal to fly the aircraft to the target area in formation was considered but rejected because of the strain on pilots and the extra fuel that would be consumed. Instead the aircraft were to follow their normal course of flying alone, but they would skim the sea for the entire daylight voyage, to avoid the enemy radar devices on Ambon Island.

Only five of the Catalinas reached Kau Bay on 14th January, and severe anti-aircraft fire was experienced by one of the Catalinas as it passed over the shipping in Lolobata Bay. One of the Catalinas returned from Kau Bay with its radar equipment out of order and in consequence had to fly at 8,000 feet altitude. A night fighter attempted an interception near Ambon. The fighter was seen by the Catalina crew, but apparently the enemy fighter pilot failed to see the Catalina. The Catalina pilot dived to 300 feet, avoided the fighter and then dropped a flare to take a wind-drift observation. The fighter again tried to intercept but failed to see the Catalina. On 16th January another four sorties were flown. On this mission the mines were laid in the east entrance to Kau Bay and off Cape Biang. Again the enemy ships in Kau Bay fired on the Catalinas, but failed to hit any of them.

The next target was to be the vital oil port of Balikpapan. Balikpapan was at extreme range and it was necessary that an advanced staging base should be established for the Catalinas on the north-western coast of Australia. On 23rd January a Catalina pilot of No. 20 Squadron flew a party of mine-warfare officers from R.A.A.F. Command and the Seventh Fleet to Cygnet Bay, near Derby in Western Australia, to determine the suitability of this harbour as an anchorage for Catalinas and a seaplane tender. Cygnet Bay was suitable since it was protected from surprise air attack by the R.A.A.F. radar station at Cape Leveque, and fighter cover could be provided from the airstrip at Derby some sixty miles away.

On 14th February, a detachment of Boomerangs of No. 85 Squadron arrived at Derby and commenced patrols over Cygnet Bay on 19th Feb-

ruary, on which day the U.S.S. *Preston* arrived and began setting up moorings for the Catalinas. The Catalinas arrived on 21st February and the crews were briefed on 22nd February. Six of them laid mines in Balikpapan harbour and the channel approach. Some eighteen searchlights were operating at Balikpapan, but none of them gave any trouble, presumably because all aircraft flew at between 200 and 300 feet. One Catalina made two circuits of the town at 200 feet without meeting hostile fire.

On the return flight, two Rufes intercepted one of the Catalinas (captained by Bolitho). One Rufe made one pass and then climbed, while the other made seven passes. The enemy aircraft scored fourteen holes in the wings, petrol tanks and oil tank. Fortunately the bullets were not incendiary and those which entered the fuel tanks remained there. The enemy pilots were evidently novices, and were content with diving attacks on the low-flying Catalina. A coordinated low-level attack would undoubtedly have brought about the destruction of the aircraft. Instead, the Catalina took part in the second operation against Balikpapan. To counter enemy fighter opposition, Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron were sent from Darwin to cover the Catalinas in daylight hours on their return flight.

On 25th February five Catalinas laid mines outside the harbour at Balikpapan without opposition and a sixth, unable to reach Balikpapan, laid its mines at Macassar. The operation against Balikpapan was now completed, and the Catalinas, after refuelling at Cygnet Bay, returned to Darwin.

During their operations against Balikpapan the Catalinas carried out eleven sorties with a 2,000-lb mine-load over 945 sea miles to the target. This was a noteworthy accomplishment and demonstrated the reliable performance of these aircraft, when handled by experienced aircrews. On the second mission to Balikpapan head winds were encountered and all aircraft returned with less than 100 gallons of fuel. It was not thought, however, that this narrow margin of fuel amounted to an undue hazard. The captains were experienced and knew exactly what their engines could do. The only danger would arise from an unfavourable change in the wind during the runs to and from the target.

In March Manokwari and Sorong in Dutch New Guinea were mined and in April the minelaying operations were reinforced by the arrival in Darwin from Karumba of No. 43 Squadron, which was assigned exclusively to minelaying. From April onwards the minelaying operations of Nos. 11 and 20 Squadrons were to be limited to points east of the 130th meridian, while No. 43 Squadron was to mine west of that meridian. The captains of No. 43 Squadron had not hitherto conducted mining missions, but a number of them had served as second pilots with Nos. 11 and 20. Minelaying in April was mainly in indirect support of the assault landings at Hollandia and Aitape and have therefore been described in the chapter dealing with that operation.

A year had now passed since the R.A.A.F. minelaying operations had begun and it appeared that the campaign was having a considerable effect

on the Japanese war economy. This belief was confirmed after the war by the evidence of Rear-Admiral Matsuzaki, chief of staff of the *Second Expeditionary Force* at Surabaya which was responsible for mine counter-measures in the Borneo, Celebes and Java areas.[8] Matsuzaki said that by the end of 1943 mines had become a serious matter. A radar-warning net was established as well as a system of watchers. Night fighters were used but proved to be ineffective. From the beginning of 1944 mining had a considerable effect on the exploitation of the resources of the Netherlands East Indies. Not only did the mines destroy ships and cargoes but convoys were delayed and unloading areas were jammed at Surabaya and Balikpapan pending sweeping operations. The destruction of tankers and the delay in oil shipments was particularly serious.

At Kavieng, the first port mined by the Australians, the enemy lost three vessels to mines. They were the 2,663-ton *Seikai Maru* on 16th September 1943; the 2,455-ton *Ryuosan Maru* on 2nd November 1943 and the 2,000-ton special survey vessel *Tsukushi* on 4th November. In addition, the mining of Silver Sound compelled the closing of the harbour on 16th September and again for 10 days in November. Captain Ohmae, a staff officer of the *South-East Area Fleet,* said after the war:

> The only place where mines interfered with military operations or plans was at Kavieng, beginning in August 1943. At that time Kavieng was very important because it was used as a supply base; and after mine attacks it was necessary to take supply ships directly from Truk to Rabaul where they were then subjected to air attack.[9]

Not only were the Japanese affected by losses of shipping and dislocation of their communications, but they were compelled to divert considerable efforts to countering the mine attacks. In the Netherlands East Indies, mining counter-measures involved the use of 1,500 men and thirty ships. Even with the counter-measures adopted, the enemy lost heavily. Matsuzaki estimated that about 40 per cent of all vessels over 1,000 tons which sailed into the Balikpapan-Surabaya area were sunk or damaged by mines. In many cases, ships were salvaged only to be sunk again. In addition to Kavieng, Catalina-laid mines forced the closing (for various periods) of Surabaya, Kau Bay, Balikpapan, Kaimana, Babo (where a 3,000-ton merchant ship was sunk by a mine on 4th July 1943), Kendari, Pomelaa and Macassar.[1]

The achievements of the Australian Catalinas were particularly notable because only a part of the effort of the three squadrons (Nos. 11, 20 and 43) engaged had been devoted to minelaying in the twelve months April 1943-April 1944. Minelaying effort equalled the full-time employ-

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[8] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials,* Vol I, p. 245.

[9] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations,* Vol II, p. 410.

[1] A report by the Operational Research Section at RAAF Command claimed that to 5th May 1944 a total of eight ships had been sunk and twelve damaged by the mines. The report assumed a total shipping loss for the first year of mining of at least 20,000 tons. These figures are not borne out by the United States Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, which credits the RAAF with sinking about 10,000 tons of shipping by mines in this period. However, this assessment does not include vessels of less than 500 tons, and it is feasible to assume that some of the discrepancy is accounted for by this fact. Moreover, the actual sinking of vessels was only incidental to the general objective of dislocating shipping.

ment of only about one-half of a squadron. To achieve the same results by bombardment on land would have required the effort of several squadrons of bombers. An over-enthusiastic contemporary report went as far as claiming that the effects of the minelaying were "in the order of 100 times as effective as attacks on land targets".

For May 1944 Balikpapan and Surabaya were the targets for the minelaying Catalinas. This mining was timed to aid the amphibious operations against Wakde and has been dealt with in the chapter dealing with that operation.

In July No. 43 Squadron mined Bima Bay (Sumbawa), Buton Strait and Surabaya. No. 20 Squadron mined Kau Bay and Palau. The operations against Surabaya were again conducted from Yampi Sound, where the facilities had been augmented by a light-weight air-warning radar set, which was mounted under canvas at the top of the highest point on Cockatoo Island. A single Beaufighter covered Yampi from dawn to dusk. No opposition whatever was encountered when the Catalinas mined the east and west channels at Surabaya on 17th July. However, on the 21st, when four aircraft set out again for Surabaya, a faint S.O.S. was received two hours later from a Catalina captained by Pilot Officer Atkinson,[2] stating that he was about to alight. A second signal an hour later stated that the aircraft was down in the sea and under attack by enemy fighters. It was considered that the remaining Catalinas might encounter determined night-fighter opposition over the target and accordingly at 6.16 p.m. a signal was sent to the captains, directing them to jettison their mines and return to Darwin immediately. However, this message was not received until the aircraft had reached the target and laid their mines.

Meanwhile, an air-sea rescue Catalina was called and requests were made for Beaufighters to rendezvous at the position given in the signal at first light next morning and for an American submarine of Task Force 71 to proceed to the area. Early next morning an aircraft, pursuing a zigzag course towards Yampi, was recorded on the radar screen. A red alarm was sounded and the staff moved away from the petrol dump. Shortly afterwards Atkinson's aircraft arrived and reported its mines laid according to plan and without opposition. Atkinson was questioned and it appeared that his wireless operator had undertaken a private rehearsal of his role in the event of an encounter with enemy fighters and did not realise that his chosen adjustment of the wireless transmitter would permit the messages to be broadcast.

The operations in July against Kau Bay and Palau were normal replenishments of fields already laid and were carried out by No. 20 Squadron, based on the seaplane tender U.S.S. *Wright* at Wundi Island. The aircraft staged to Wundi through Milne Bay and Port Moresby.

In August Pomelaa was mined with magnetic-acoustic mines. One Catalina was holed by 20-mm gun fire from a merchant vessel lying in the emergency anchorage and two captains, who failed to find the target area

[2] F-O A. N. L. Atkinson, DFC, 410827; 43 Sqn. Student; of East Malvern, Vic; b. Melbourne, 30 Sep 1922.

because of the bad weather, were forced to jettison their mines. Pomelaa was always an important strategic target both for long-range bombers and minelayers. It was the main enemy source of nickel. It was estimated that at Pomelaa in 1944 the enemy could produce 300,000 tons of nickel ore, which would yield 4,000 tons of nickel yearly, representing 67 per cent of his total needs. This nickel source was first worked in 1937. Until the war began the entire output of the treatment plant had been shipped to Krupps in Germany. Later, the Japanese became the sole customers of the company which worked the concessions.

It was clear during 1944 that the minelaying campaign was achieving results. There had been twenty-five ships credited as sunk or damaged by aerial mines in the Netherlands East Indies up to September 1944 and although the actual sinkings and damage inflicted were not as high as this claim, good results were being obtained. Australian losses had been six Catalinas, of which two of the crews had been saved. The losses were one aircraft for every 95 sorties.

The good results obtained by the Catalinas justified the assignment of more aircraft entirely to mining duties. In September 1944, therefore, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock assigned Nos. 20, 42 and 43 Squadrons solely to this work. He also directed No. 76 Wing Headquarters, then at Cairns, to move to Darwin and take over control of these three squadrons. The Wing headquarters arrived at Darwin in September and by October was firmly established at Doctor's Gully under the command of Wing Commander Burrage.[3] Each of the three squadrons was capable of 830 hours operational flying a month, and as each minelaying sortie, including operational travel time, involved an average of less than twenty-four hours flying, the three squadrons would be capable of carrying out 100 sorties a month compared with 20 a month in the first six months of operations.

No. 42 Squadron, commanded by Wing Commander Costello,[4] had been assembling at Darwin during August 1944, awaiting transfer to a new Catalina base on Melville Bay. No. 20 Squadron transferred from Cairns to this new base. It arrived in September in time to accept a share in the month's mining program. The squadron had to face many difficulties in settling in at the new camp site, and at the same time carrying out operations. The ship transporting the squadron to Darwin arrived two days ahead of its expected time, with the result that final arrangements for unloading, transport, rations and bedding had to be made and put into effect within a few hours.

R.A.A.F. Command had withdrawn No. 11 Squadron from minelaying operations and directed it to move south from Cairns to Rathmines in New South Wales, where it took part in anti-submarine patrols and served as a reservoir for trained Catalina crews.

In the period 13th September to 5th October the Catalinas flew ninety-eight sorties, laying 196 mines of various types. They visited Bangka Strait

[3] Gp Capt R. B. Burrage, OBE, DFC, 212. 10 Sqn; comd 461 Sqn 1942; 202 Sqn RAF, 11 Sqn; comd 76 Wing 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. Auburn, Vic, 13 Sep 1917.

[4] W Cdr J. P. Costello, 404. 10 and 20 Sqns; comd 42 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Heidelberg, Vic, 17 May 1917. Killed in aircraft accident 9 Apr 1955.

(Celebes) and the Pasuruan, Probolinggo and Panarukan roads in Java. The east and west channels at Surabaya were mined by Catalinas operating from Yampi Sound on the nights of 11th-12th and 15th-16th October.

No. 42 Squadron suffered losses from anti-aircraft fire at Macassar between 11th and 23rd October. As the aircraft had usually succeeded in laying mines with little opposition on the first night against a new target, all runs close to the known anti-aircraft positions were planned for the first night. However, Macassar had just been severely bombed by Liberators, which meant that anti-aircraft batteries ashore and on vessels in the harbour would be alert. There was also a large amount of shipping in the harbour, providing opposition that could not have been predicted.

On 11th October there was no opposition to the first sortie, and though the second Catalina was fired on by a destroyer it suffered no damage. The third plane saw the anti-aircraft fire from the destroyer and moved away to do an alternative run away from the shipping. It too drew anti-aircraft fire from ships, but went unscathed.

The next night the Catalinas of No. 42 were under orders to complete those runs at Macassar which were reasonably far from the fixed defences and shipping. The first run was completed without opposition. The second drew anti-aircraft fire from the shore while withdrawing. The third aircraft completed its run too close to the shore and was holed in three places by 20-mm fire, while a Bofors gun aboard the destroyer shot away most of the tail plane of a fourth Catalina.

On 14th-15th October, two more Catalinas of No. 42 Squadron (captained by Squadron Leader Grant[5] and Flight Lieutenant Williams[6]) were ordered to continue the mining of Macassar. Grant completed his run without experiencing anti-aircraft fire. While withdrawing, however, his crew saw a Bofors gun open fire. The shots appeared to stop at 500 feet. About fifteen seconds later the crew saw a blazing object on the water. Williams' aircraft failed to return and it was assumed that he had been shot down into the water between the breakwater and the town. Williams knew of the danger from anti-aircraft fire and had been warned to stay well clear of the dock area and the breakwaters. However, there was a strong wind and it looked as though his aircraft may have drifted more than he realised. This was the first aircraft crew to be lost since 20th May 1944 and the fifth crew in 1,000 sorties.

Four more Catalinas were sent to Macassar on the night of 23rd-24th October. They were captained by Costello, Grant, Flying Officer Lee[7] and Pilot Officer Hull.[8] Hull was the first over the target and had no sooner begun his minelaying run than his Catalina was hit by anti-aircraft fire from a destroyer. His starboard engine failed but he carried on and

[5] Sqn Ldr K. W. Grant, 260288. 11 and 20 Sqns; comd 42 Sqn 1945. Clerk; of Strathfield, NSW; b. Strathfield, 12 Jan 1914.

[6] F-Lt C. A. Williams, 16322. 20, 11, 43 and 42 Sqns. Physical culture instructor; of Nedlands, WA; b. Subiaco, WA, 5 Jul 1913. Killed in action 14 Oct 1944.

[7] F-Lt H. R. Lee, 417088. 20 and 42 Sqns, and 113 ASR Flight. Bank clerk; of North Unley, SA; b. Kadina, SA, 8 Nov 1923.

[8] F-O C. D. Hull, 401846. 7, 14, 32, 6, 67, 11 and 42 Sqns. Student; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Prahran, Vic, 27 Jan 1921.

completed the minelaying as ordered. Grant and Lee laid their mines without opposition, but Costello failed to find the target and finally jettisoned his mines. He then began an extensive search for Hull's aircraft. He failed to find it because of the haze, and shortage of fuel forced him to land at Bathurst Island to refuel. The other two aircraft, although they picked up radio messages from Hull's aircraft, also could not find it and were forced to abandon the search. However, next morning a Catalina of No. 43 Squadron, captained by Flying Officer Etienne,[9] arrived and picked up the entire crew. After setting fire to the disabled Catalina with machine-guns, the rescue Catalina took off and returned safely to Darwin. The rescue operation was covered by a Liberator which had found the Catalina and led the rescue plane to the scene. The rescue was effected close to four Japanese operational airfields in southern Celebes.

Morotai, which had been seized by Allied forces on 15th September 1944, provided a new forward base for the minelaying operations against the Netherlands East Indies and the Philippines. In October, U.S.S. *Tangier,* a seaplane tender, arrived off Morotai and provided tender facilities for the R.A.A.F. Catalinas. The Catalinas flew from Darwin with their mine loads, refuelled from the *Tangier* at Morotai, and for several nights mined Balikpapan and a new target, Tarakan, an oil port previously beyond the range of the Catalinas. The Thirteenth Air Force, which heavily attacked Balikpapan in daylight in this period, reported five barrage balloons at the target. However, the tracks of the minelaying planes carried them well clear of these obstacles and they did not meet any other form of opposition. The mining of Balikpapan at this time met with successes. Two Japanese merchant vessels were sunk: the 2,219-ton *Seito Maru* on 26th October, and the 2,863-ton *Kokko Maru* on 29th October.

At the end of November and in early December, the Catalinas flew twenty sorties in an attempt to block Balabac Strait. Other Catalinas mined Manila Bay. Both of these missions were part of the widespread interdiction operations in support of the Allied landing on Mindoro, one of the Philippine Islands. Both the minelaying mission and the landing at Mindoro are described elsewhere in this volume.

In spite of constant mining at Surabaya, this port was still active. It was considered that the sweeping of mines by the Japanese would be ineffective because of the crude methods in use. Yet, after sweeping, the port was opened and considerable numbers of merchant ships were clearing it. A Japanese lieut-commander who was captured after the sinking of the destroyer *Michishio* on 25th October 1944, said that in October 1944 a signal was received aboard the *Michishio* advising that the harbours of Balikpapan and Surabaya were mined by Allied magnetic mines. However, the prisoner heard that sweeping executed at both places was successful; therefore there was no need to re-equip vessels with degaussing equipment. The prisoner said that generally, although some ships were

[9] F-Lt A. A. Etienne, DFC, 415632, 107, 11 and 43 Sqns. Agriculturalist; of West Perth, WA; b. Odessa, Russia, 15 Sep 1918.

lost to magnetic mines, the results of sweepers were usually very good and losses not severe. Sweeping was done by a small wooden minesweeper which towed minesweeping gear astern. It would be necessary to continue to replenish the minefields at Surabaya on each dark of the moon period for as long as shipping continued to use the port.

In January 1945 the Darwin area was enduring the wet monsoonal season. Successful sorties by the minelaying Catalinas dropped as flying conditions became worse. In all, eleven crews were forced to return. Jettisoning of mines increased to fifteen for the month. Weather-bound planes lay at West Bay, Truscott, for days waiting for the weather to clear.

The plan for the continued mining of Surabaya was changed at the last moment in January 1945 on the strength of information from a prisoner of war. The prisoner had visited the port shortly before capture and said that a new buoyed channel was being used along the western part of the northern entrance. The approximate positions of the buoys were obtained and the mining plans revised to block this passage.

On the night of 9th January, twenty mines were laid by ten Catalinas which experienced rifle fire from Madura Island and east of Cape Modung. On subsequent nights fierce rain, heavy cloud and strong winds interfered with mining, and several captains were forced to dump their mines in a shipping area near Madura. Head winds up to forty knots were reported by returning crews and three of the Catalinas returned to base from Surabaya, one with only 30 gallons of fuel remaining, a second with 40, and the third with 50.

On the night of 14th January, during a mission to Surabaya, a plane from No. 42 Squadron, captained by Flight Lieutenant Harrigan,[1] experienced trouble with its port engine and immediately began to lose altitude. At the time Harrigan was flying at 300 feet below heavy cloud off Sumba Island. He jettisoned his mines, but the plane continued to lose altitude and he was forced to alight on the open sea. The hull of the Catalina was damaged and began to leak. However, the water was kept down by baling. Using the radio-telephone, the crew was able to make its position known to returning minelayers. All night they worked on the faulty engine, but without success. However, in the morning, a Catalina of No. 43 Squadron, captained by Flight Lieutenant Ortlepp,[2] landed in the heavy swell, covered by a Liberator, and took off Harrigan's crew. Ortlepp then destroyed the disabled Catalina with machine-gun fire and returned safely to base.

In spite of the constant mining, the Japanese were determined to keep Surabaya clear for shipping movements. Crew reports for February gave evidence of more vigorous counter-measures than had been noticed for some time. Searchlights probing about the north entrance were keen and light machine-gun fire came from most of the likely starting places for

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[1] F-Lt R. J. Harrigan, 406489. 20, 43 and 42 Sqns, and 113 ASR Flight. Clerk; of Mt Lawley, WA; b. Geraldton, WA, 27 Sep 1918.

[2] F-Lt B. Ortlepp, DFC, 407683. 20 and 43 Sqns. Clerk; of North Norwood, SA; b. North Norwood, 8 Feb 1922.

mining runs. In the channels, small boats, sent out to mark the mine landing points, opened up on the low-flying aircraft with .5-calibre machine-gun fire, holing one of them. One aircraft reported radar jamming and, on 13th February, two crew members of Flying Officer Bergmann's[3] Catalina saw white flashes on the water just below their Catalina. Loud explosions shook the aircraft immediately afterwards. For want of any evidence to the contrary, it seemed that the Catalina had been attacked with anti-aircraft bombs dropped from an enemy night fighter.

In January, as well as mining Surabaya, the Catalinas mined Laut Strait and Macassar. Operating from Darwin and refuelling at West Bay, aircraft of Nos. 20, 42 and 43 Squadrons flew a total of eighteen sorties, laying mines in the northern and southern entrances to the strait. A few rifle shots was the only opposition. On the night of 27th-28th January, an aircraft of No. 20 Squadron captained by Flight Lieutenant Seage failed to return. Other Catalinas out on this mission encountered a cyclone over the Timor Sea, together with lightning and turbulence. It was considered that Seage and the members of his crew got into difficulties in this area.

Between 5th and 28th February the Catalinas completed a total of sixty-seven successful sorties against targets at Surabaya, Pasuruan Road, Laut Strait, Cape Selatan and Malasoro Bay, Celebes. Some encouragement came from the Cape Selatan mining. On 8th April a submarine sank one coastal vessel and its escort, forty miles off Cape Selatan; and on 29th April a large loaded German tanker six miles south of Laut Strait. The near-by minefield appeared to have forced these vessels into deep water where they became a prey to the submarines.

Japanese merchant shipping losses in 1944 had reached nearly 4,000,000 tons. From September 1943 until the end of 1944 Allied submarines alone sank 3,000,000 tons of shipping. The Allied submarine force had so greatly expanded that no sea route was safe from its attack. The Japanese had shown they were astonishingly unprepared to convoy and protect their merchant ships either from air or sea attack. Few vessels were available for convoy service. Nevertheless, ships were sent out unprotected in groups and losses were heavy as a result. By the middle of 1944 Japanese ships were hugging coastlines wherever possible to stay in shallow waters beyond reach of submarines. Belatedly the enemy introduced a convoy system, but its effectiveness was low. The network of convoy routes reached its maximum in mid-1944 but in the next twelve months was progressively abandoned.

Early in 1945 only a trickle of ships was moving from Formosa along the South China and French Indo-China coasts to Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies. The Americans were firmly established in the Philippine Islands and their aircraft were reaching out across the South China Sea to attack the Japanese merchantmen which were sailing in daylight to avoid massacre by the submarines. In mid-January Admiral Halsey's

[3] F-O J. C. Bergmann, 416531. 71, 107, 43 and 11 Sqns and 111 ASR Flight. Shop assistant-farmer; of Ceduna, SA; b. Denial Bay, SA, 11 Jun 1921.

greatly reinforced carrier fleets swept down into the South China Sea and in the waters around Formosa, Hong Kong and French Indo-China, and carrier planes sank about 280,000 tons of Japanese shipping, more than 10 per cent of the existing merchant-marine fleet, and of the naval vessels that convoyed and protected it. In spite of this blow, the Japanese, desperately needing the products of Malaya, Borneo and the Indies, continued to route ships through the South China Sea.

At this stage the Australian Catalinas were called on to lay mines to reinforce the minefields in Formosan waters, the Pescadores, Hainan Strait, Hong Kong, Amoy and other ports in south China. To carry out these operations, a detachment of eight Catalinas was to be maintained at Jinamoc, in the Philippine Islands. Burrage directed that No. 43 Squadron would provide four aircraft and No. 20 the remaining four. They were to carry out twenty sorties within ten days and then return to Darwin. Another eight aircraft would then replace them at Jinamoc to repeat the program. The advanced party, headed by Burrage, left for Jinamoc on the 24th February, and set up an advanced headquarters, operations and maintenance sections staffed by 130 men. The American seaplane base at Jinamoc, which is at the head of Leyte Gulf, housed the shore working and living quarters.

The plan of operations called for mid-morning take-off from Jinamoc and refuelling during the afternoon from a seaplane tender, *Orca,* at Lingayen Gulf, Luzon, which was almost a third of the way to the targets. The Catalinas were then to take off late in the evening and make for the China coast. Return trips were to be direct to Jinamoc unless fuel shortage forced a visit to Mindoro or Lingayen Gulf.

Operations began on the 3rd March. Wing Commanders McMahon[4] and Wearne[5] and Flying Officer Atkinson mined Yulinkan Bay, Hainan Island. Visibility was poor due to cloud and because of confusion about a datum point two of the mines were planted in the same position. Two other Catalinas (Flight Lieutenant Corrie[6] and Warrant Officer Brown[7]) mined Hainan Strait on the same night. Neither mission experienced enemy opposition. The Catalinas had an immediate success, the 4,000-ton auxiliary vessel *Hario* being sunk by one of their mines.

Further missions to Hainan and also to Hong Kong, Takao, Macao, Swatow and Amoy followed in March, during which 169 mines were dropped, and April when 193 were dropped. During the entire period of the China coast mining only one aircraft was lost. This occurred on the night of the 7th-8th March when a Catalina of No. 20 Squadron,

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[4] W Cdr P. J. McMahon, DFC, 459. Pilot of amphibian in HMAS *Manoora* 1940-42; comd 9 Sqn 1942-43, 43 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Port Pirie, SA; b. Port Pirie, 29 Dec 1917.

[5] W Cdr A. G. H. Wearne, DSO, DFC, 464. 10 and 11 Sqns; comd 20 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Midland Junction, WA; b. Midland Junction, 28 Oct 1916.

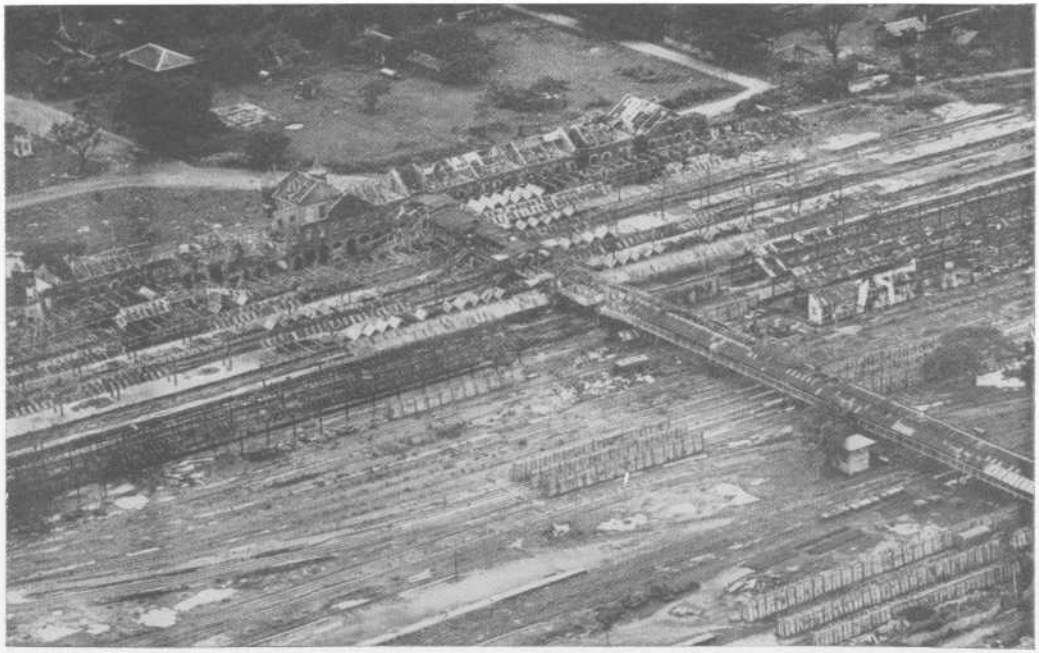
[6] F-Lt R. M. Corrie, DFC, 404170. 228 and 202 Sqns RAF; comd 112 ASR Flight 1945. Clerk; of Clayfield, Qld; b. Sydney, 2 Sep 1920.

[7] F-O A. J. Brown, 413819. 71, 107, 11 and 20 Sqns, and 112 ASR Flight. Clerk; of Leichhardt, NSW; b. Merewether, NSW, 3 Nov 1919.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

F-O C. A. Crombie, an Australian serving in No. 176 Squadron R.A.F., who was awarded the DSO for having shot down two, and probably three, Japanese bombers, south of Calcutta on 19th January 1943. W Cdr J. A. O'Neill is on the left.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

The central railway station at Rangoon after it had been abandoned by the Japanese in April 1945. It was the main port in Burma for traffic from the Japanese homeland, and an important marshalling and distribution point, and during the campaign was subjected to constant air bombardment in which many Australians distributed among R.A.F. squadrons took part.



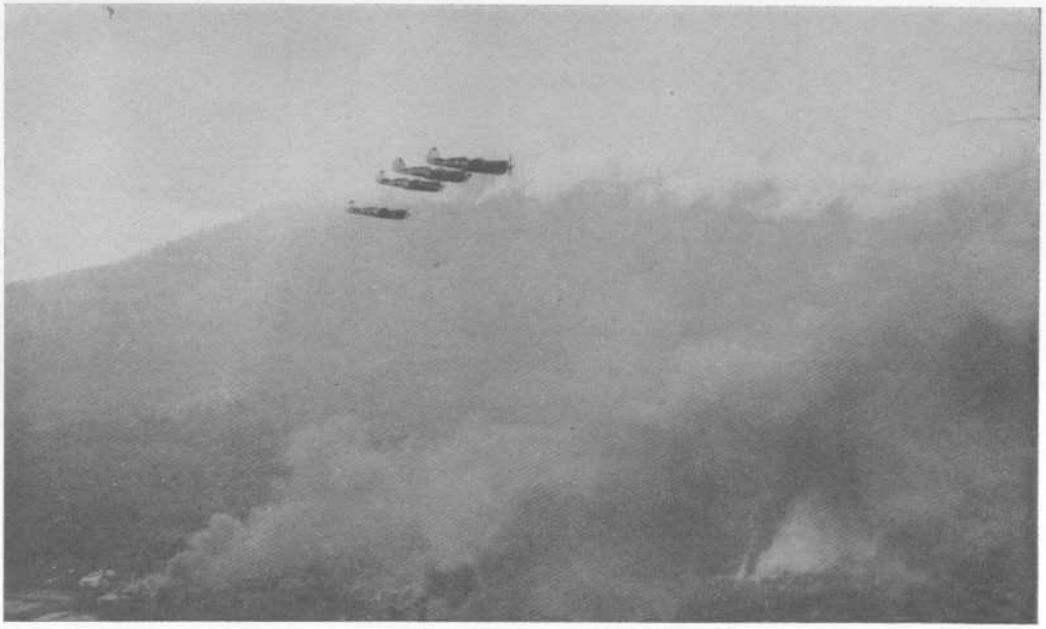
*(R.A.A.F.)*

Air force leaders at Morotai in April 1945. Left to right: Air Vice-Marshal W. D. Bostock, air officer commanding R.A.A.F. Command; General George C. Kenney, commander, Allied Air Forces, S.W.P.A.; and Air Vice-Marshal G. Jones, Chief of the Air Staff.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Part of the airfield at Morotai in April 1945, showing the fighter strip and some of the dispersal areas on which are parked Dakota transports, Mitchells, Black Widows and Lockheed Lightnings.



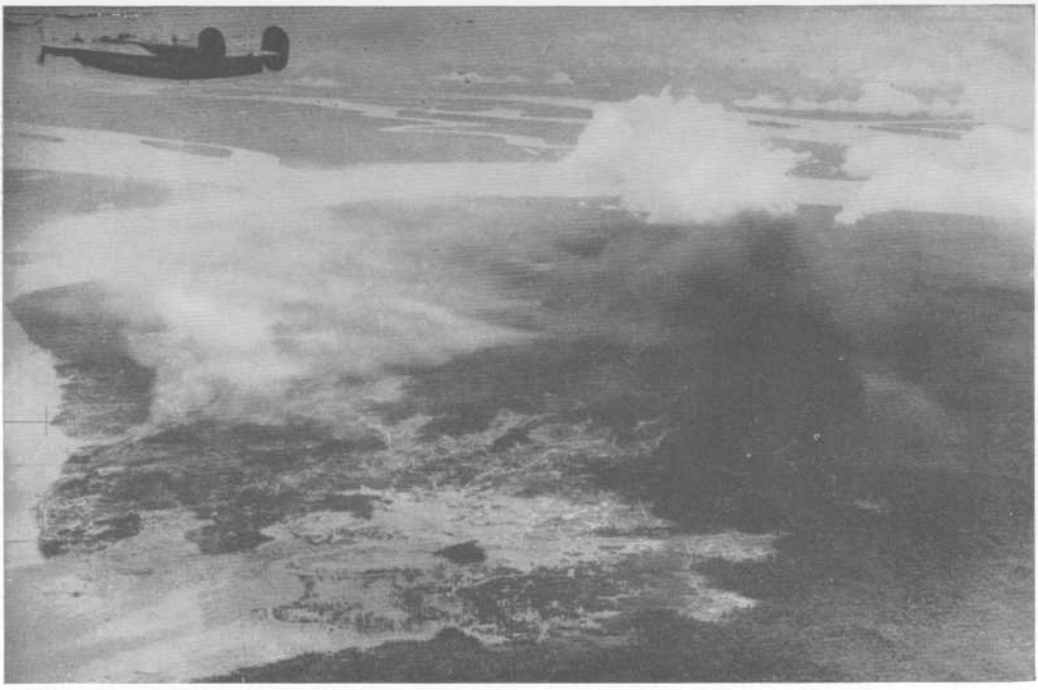
*(R.A.A.F.)*

Four Kittyhawks of the First T.A.F. returning to base after bombing and setting on fire Japanese buildings and supply dumps on Ternate Island, on 11th April 1945. They are still over the target area, and below can be seen the smoke and flames from the fires.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A Japanese six-gun 75-mm anti-aircraft battery at Wasile Bay, Halmahera Island, being attacked with para-frag bombs. Fused to explode above the ground the para-frag bomb was particularly effective against this type of target and against dispersed aircraft.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

For weeks previous to the landing at Tarakan, First Tactical Air Force and the Thirteenth Air Force carried out saturation bombing in the area where the landing was to be made, and afterwards bombed selected enemy positions. Here a Liberator returns from such a mission in early May 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Tarakan airstrip before the invasion. Engineers of Nos. 1 and 8 Airfield Construction Squadrons had the task of restoring this airstrip.

captained by Pilot Officer Schulz,[8] was one of three ordered to the Pescadores Islands, between Formosa and the mainland of China. In spite of difficult weather and poor visibility two of the planes successfully laid mines. Schulz's aircraft, however, failed to return to base and it was considered that the unfavourable weather, rather than the enemy, had caused the Catalina to crash. Searches were made for the aircraft and crew next day but were negative. On 16th March two more Catalinas set off from Jinamoc to mine the Pescadores again. One only got through the foul weather, and when it did found the target enshrouded in fog.

By mid-March the Japanese, now aware of the imminent invasion by the Americans of either Formosa or Okinawa Island, discontinued further attempts to route convoys from Japan through the South China Sea to Singapore. On 19th March, therefore, the mining of Takao and the Pescadores was abandoned on the advice of the Seventh Fleet. Hardly any shipping was left in the area.

In April Catalinas of No. 76 Wing, now commanded by Group Captain Campbell,[9] mined the approaches to the ports of Hong Kong, Amoy, Swatow, and mined other waterways, including the approaches to Surabaya Strait, where strong anti-aircraft fire was encountered on this and other visits. On 8th April, for example, three Catalinas of No. 20 Squadron flew to Hong Kong. There was a thick haze over the port and although two aircraft laid their mines in the approaches to the harbour, the third could not find the target, despite having spent half an hour in the area. These sorties took from fifteen and a quarter to sixteen hours.

In May the Australian Catalinas continued to operate on the China coast, where the city of Wenchow was added to the list of targets. The Wenchow operation was the most northerly penetration of any Australian aircraft in the Pacific War. Four aircraft of No. 20 Squadron, piloted by Flight Lieutenants Titshall, Whitworth,[1] Granger[2] and Clarke,[3] mined the approaches to this harbour on 26th May. The crews observed many junks in the target area and two lighthouses were operating in the approaches.

At Amoy, mining of the most frequently-used channel brought a reaction from the enemy, on the 10th May. A night fighter attacked one Catalina fifteen minutes after leaving the target. The fighter made two passes, firing short bursts each time, but caused no damage. During May extensive mining was carried out at Hong Kong to close the two main shipping channels.

On the 13th May a conference was held at Manila to fix operational areas for the air forces in the South-West Pacific Area and, at this meeting,

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[8] P-O R. W. Schulz, 417318; 20 Sqn. Clerk; of Willunga, SA; b. Hahndorf, SA, 11 Jun 1923. Killed in action 8 Mar 1945.

[9] Gp Capt S. A. C. Campbell, 66. Comd 24 Sqn 1940-41, 7 SFTS 1941-42, 42 Sqn 1944-45, 76 Wing 1945-46. Engineer; of Darling Point, NSW; b. Sydney, 27 Mar 1903.

[1] Sqn Ldr G. M. Whitworth, 3614. 20 and 11 Sqns. Regular airman; of Pascoe Vale, Vic; b. Elsternwick, Vic, 17 Apr 1914.

[2] F-Lt J. H. Granger, 411313. 11 and 20 Sqns. Factory manager; of Parramatta, NSW; b. Parramatta, 25 Jun 1916.

[3] F-Lt I. A. F. Clarke, 401346. 228 Sqn RAF, 461, 460, 11 and 20 Sqns. Clerk; of Footscray, Vic; b. Footscray, 9 Nov 1921.

it was decided to confine R.A.A.F. mining activities to areas below 18 degrees north latitude. Instructions were therefore issued to the R.A.A.F. to complete the China theatre program by 1st June.

The number of targets worth mining below latitude 18 degrees north were very few. However, in June, 58 mining sorties were carried out by No. 76 Wing, and 132 mines were laid. Of these sorties, seventeen were carried out from Labuan Island. The aircraft took on their mines at Jinamoc, refuelled at Labuan, and then flew south-west to mine Banka Strait. The flying-boats were operating from Labuan only six days after the landing by the 9th Division. Considerable difficulty had to be overcome. The operations were important because many enemy ships continued to sail between Singapore and Batavia, and it was designed to force this shipping into the open water.

The first operation against Banka Strait took place on 20th June. Five crews were briefed for this mission and eleven mines were laid. The Catalinas saw many small craft in the strait. They strafed a camouflaged barge without seeing any results. More mine plantings took place without opposition on the 23rd, 25th, 26th and 29th June. In July, the operation against Banka Strait continued. It was the last area the R.A.A.F. Catalinas mined in the Pacific War. The Commander, Allied Air Forces, had signalled early in July ordering suspension of all mining from the 10th of that month. This field was the only exception. Its closeness to Brunei Bay meant that full loads could be carried. By the end of July 117 mines had been planted there. A subsidiary task of No. 76 Wing throughout this period was the dropping of propaganda leaflets. In June, for example, 1,256,000 were distributed over places in the East Indies and the China Sea.

The Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee, after examining all claims of Japanese shipping sunk in the Pacific War, came to the conclusion that mines laid by the Australian Catalinas sank nine vessels totalling 21,033 tonnage. The tonnage damaged is not shown, nor are the sinking of merchant vessels of less than 500 tons. R.A.A.F. claims at the end of the war were 23 ships sunk and 27 damaged by the Australian-laid mines. The main discrepancy between the two sets of figures is due to the fact that ten vessels were claimed as having been sunk by the R.A.A.F. at Surabaya, whereas the Joint Army-Navy Assessment Committee does not allow any mine sinkings at that port.

Allowing that the R.A.A.F. minelaying Catalinas did sink more tonnage than is admitted by the committee, and this seems likely, it will be seen that the results in terms of the total Japanese shipping losses were relatively small. The total number of Japanese vessels sunk during the war was 3,032 with a tonnage of 10,583,755. Of this total, American submarines sank 1,314 vessels totalling 5,320,094 tons. The R.A.A.F., however, laid mines on only a small scale and, when measured against the effort made, the results were satisfactory, and in addition, the laying of mines was often an important factor in impeding local operations.

It was not until Superfortresses from the Marianas joined in minelaying operations late in March 1945, that large numbers of enemy ships were sunk by this means. The laying of mines by the Superfortresses in Shimonoseki Strait made this important shipping crossroads virtually impassable and the administration of Japanese shipping was thrown into chaos. Of a total of 266 Japanese ships sunk by mines during the Pacific War, the majority were accounted for by mines laid by the Superfortresses in the closing months of the war. The United States Strategic Bombing Survey, after examining these results, concluded:

> It is believed that this campaign, begun earlier and laid on with greater weight, would have reduced effective shipping nearly to the vanishing point. It would thus have produced a condition of crisis in Japan sooner than actually occurred.[4]

[4] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *The War Against Japanese Transportation, 1941-1945*, p. 8.

CHAPTER 23

# MINDORO AND LUZON

AS soon as MacArthur's forces were securely lodged ashore at Leyte, preparations began for the second phase of the operations against the Japanese in the Philippines. This was the landing on Luzon at Lingayen Gulf, followed by a drive on Manila, the capital. As a preliminary, however, and in order to provide land-based aircraft close enough to cover the ground operations on Luzon, a smaller landing was to be made on Mindoro just south of Luzon. From Mindoro Fifth Air Force aircraft would be within easy reach of Luzon. Aircraft based on Mindoro would also be in a position to assist in keeping open the line of seaborne communications through the Visayan Islands—the central islands of the archipelago.

Again the Fifth Air Force was to be the assault air force for the operation, with the Thirteenth Air Force in support, and R.A.A.F. Command continuing its garrison and air blockade assignments and protecting the flank in the Netherlands East Indies.

Although the general policy of not using Australian army and air force units directly in the Philippines was still pursued, there was an acute shortage of engineer and airfield construction strength in the South-West Pacific Area, and No. 3 Airfield Construction Squadron of the R.A.A.F. had been assigned to the Mindoro operation. The invasion of Mindoro was a risky undertaking. The greatest danger was considered to be an enemy naval counter-thrust followed by landing operations, and for this reason American naval units were to remain in the area for a week.

The airfield situation in the Philippines was causing anxiety. The airfield at Tacloban could not handle more than about 100 aircraft, while other airfields because of the muddy conditions, were developing only slowly, or had limited possibilities. The services of airfield construction engineers were much in demand, and an American Air Corps historian wrote: "The grader and the bulldozer became weapons almost as important as the plane itself and generally more useful in the campaigns, one may suppose, than the tank."

The original plan for the Mindoro operation called for a landing on 5th December. However, the stubborn resistance of the Japanese on the west side of Leyte and the slowness in the development of airfields at Leyte, from which aircraft were to cover the operation, had forced the postponement of the landing until 15th December. General Kenney expected that because of the airfield situation at Leyte it would be necessary to use Mindoro as a base for bombers, whereas he had planned to use it only as a fighter base.

On 1st November a signal arrived at First T.A.F. from Sixth Army directing No. 3 Airfield Construction Squadron R.A.A.F. to be ready to

load on four L.S.T's at Morotai on the 15th November. All engineer units except No. 14 Squadron of the R.A.A.F. were to move out of Morotai, leaving No. 14 Squadron and division engineers to complete the requirements and maintain facilities there for American and Australian squadrons.

No. 3 Construction Squadron was commanded by Squadron Leader Bouch[1] and had been employed at Morotai in building and maintaining airfields, taxiways and parking areas. It left Morotai on 16th November for Biak where it joined the main convoy for Leyte. Although attacked on the way by enemy torpedo bombers the convoy suffered no damage or casualties and arrived on 24th November at Leyte where it was to await onward movement to Mindoro. On this and subsequent days the squadron was subjected to air raids, but unloading was completed without casualties. Airfield construction at Leyte had been a failure. On the day the squadron arrived only two fighter airfields were in operation, and aircraft were crowded along the edge of the strips. Work had been abandoned on a third field because the road giving access to it had become impassable.

Minelaying Catalinas of No. 76 Wing operating from Darwin were called on to aid the Mindoro landing by laying mines in Manila Bay where it was hoped that enemy shipping would be bottled up. They were also to mine Balabac Strait, Borneo.

The mining of the main channel of Balabac Strait took place on the nights of 28th, 29th and 30th November when 60 British and American mines were planted.

Although Halsey's carrier planes had struck heavily at Japanese surface activity in Manila Bay, mining was considered necessary to help protect the Mindoro landing. There were difficulties in the way of this operation by slow-flying Catalinas in a strongly-defended harbour. It was flanked by the defences of Corregidor and Cavite and it was imperative that the mining be completed as rapidly as possible. The whole of the sixty mines necessary had to be dropped in one night.

No. 76 Wing could provide only 18 Catalinas for the task and another six had to be brought up from No. 11 Squadron at Rathmines. The Catalinas were to set out from Leyte on the 14th December to lay the mines, but Leyte could accommodate only twelve Catalinas. The other twelve were to be sent to Wundi Island and were to proceed to Leyte on the morning of the operation. This group would refuel, carry out the mission and return to Leyte for rest. The first group originally based at Leyte would carry out the mission, return to Leyte, refuel and proceed to Wundi. The American naval tender *Heron* was available to refuel and service the aircraft.

The minelaying operation would take the Catalinas to the centre of enemy air defence in the Philippines and was therefore hazardous from

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[1] Sqn Ldr A. D. Bouch, DSO, 264241. 1 Mobile Works Sqn; comd 3 Works Maintenance Unit 1942-43, 3 Mobile Works Sqn 1943-44, 3 Airfield Construction Sqn 1944-45. Civil engineer; of Kingsford, NSW; b. Strathloddon, Vic, 19 Jan 1903.

the point of view of night-fighter opposition. In order to protect the Catalinas from this danger, American Liberator bombers were to carry out diversionary raids and an American Catalina would drop "window"[2] to blanket enemy radar defences.

On 14th December, the commanders of Nos. 43 and 11 Squadrons briefed their crews on the route to be taken to the target, and the intelligence officer of No. 43 briefed on escape points, radar locations and the positions of anti-aircraft guns. No alternate target was assigned because the primary target was a "must".

The Catalinas began taking off at 4.30 p.m. on 14th December. They circled near Leyte until all planes were in the air and on signal from the radar-jamming plane, all Catalinas flew singly to Manila Bay. All of them found the target and made their runs with only minor difficulties. Catalinas of No. 11 Squadron experienced some small arms fire near Lake Taal and No. 43 Squadron was fired on by machine-guns and rifles from the east coast of Bataan peninsula. The crews saw heavy anti-aircraft guns open fire round Manila and Corregidor but it was not directed at the Catalinas.

There was little opposition and the Japanese had evidently had little warning of the approach of the Catalinas. This was attributed to the work of the radar-jamming aircraft and the tactics employed. The jamming succeeded to such an extent that all seventeen radar stations encountered along the route ceased transmitting as the Catalinas approached. One of the Australian aircraft (captained by Flight Lieutenant Roberts[3]) failed to return, and two others almost flew into mountains on their way down into the bowl-shaped bay.[4] With the raid completed the Catalinas made for the island of Samar where they remained in the air until a dawn landing at Leyte was possible. This was pre-arranged because the air force operations staff at Leyte would not permit night landings. Although the Catalinas carried their maximum load of fuel they were very low on fuel before dawn came, and several aircraft had to make emergency landings on the sea. Others landed at Leyte almost completely out of fuel.

Meanwhile, on 11th December, No. 3 A.C.S. had left Leyte with the Mindoro Task Force. The loading of the convoy could not be kept secret; much of the population of Leyte was aware of the impending move and on the radio "Tokyo Rose" reported, during the evening of 10th December, that the assault force was two days late and that 600 Australians were included in the operation!

The first enemy air raid on the convoy had occurred on 13th December, when the command cruiser *Nashville* was hit by a suicide dive bomber

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[2] Window was the device of dropping bundles of thin metallised strips of tin foil over enemy territory, which, scattering in their descent, would produce myriad echoes on a radar screen, and thus obscure the echo made by an aircraft.

[3] F-Lt H. C. Roberts, 406368; 43 Sqn. Bank officer; of Nedlands, WA; b. Bunbury, WA, 7 Nov 1912. Killed in action 14 Dec 1944.

[4] Other members of Roberts' crew were: F-Lt J. H. Cox (of Canberra), F-O's F. W. Silvester (Belmore, NSW), R. C. Barbour (Nth Melbourne), and R. H. Bradstreet (West Leederville, WA); F-Sgt D. J. Albert (Auburn, NSW); and Sgts J. C. MacDonald (Balgowlah, NSW), H. S. Goodchild (Perth, WA), and J. R. Robinson (Watson's Bay, NSW).

causing heavy casualties to American personnel—some 200 were killed, including Colonel Bruce C. Hill, chief of staff of the force. A twin-engined Betty bomber was shot down by escorting Lightning aircraft, while another fell to a Corsair.

Mindoro was sighted soon after dawn on 15th December and the convoy was formed up for the landing. The events of the landing are described in the terse phrases of the diary of Squadron Leader Overend,[5] a staff officer of No. 61 Airfield Construction Wing, who was present. He wrote:

> Up at 0400 [4 a.m.] to general quarters. Coffee and roll for breakfast. Naval guns are in action as an enemy transport is picked up by escort. It is hit within three minutes and large fire starts, lasting some hours. Then there is dead silence. Orders were received late last night for 3 Airfield Construction Squadron to go in on the first wave. After dawn, Mindoro is dead ahead and naval bombardment commences. Ships are forming into beach lines and into waves. Enemy aircraft appear low down and are held off by anti-aircraft fire. Beach markers are visible. San Jose is prominent, red roof and black stack on the sugar mill. The beach has a grass verge and the infantry are landing ankle deep. Eight LST's are moving into the shore at White Beach. Infantry are moving inland slowly across the grass flats. On the last lap as we go in, six aircraft appear directly overhead. Five are shot down by anti-aircraft fire but a sixth successfully suicide-dived into the rear LST. A second LST is also hit. Even after being shot down while in a suicide dive, the pilot attempts to complete his mission. We make a dry landing on a good beach. Survivors from damaged LST's are being brought ashore. The R.A.A.F. is being unloaded first.

All day in the hot sun the men of the squadron toiled to get equipment and supplies off as quickly as possible and dispersed inland so that the LST's could withdraw from the beach-head which was under constant air attack. Leading Aircraftman Barham,[6] who was helping to unload stores at Red Beach was killed and several men badly burned when an enemy aircraft attempted to crash-dive into the open door of an LST. One airman had his shirt burnt off but luckily escaped injury. Enemy raids on the beach-head were taking place at half-hourly intervals, but without respite the men unloaded bulldozers, tractors, graders, power shovels, power rollers, a big fleet of trucks, generating sets, weapon carriers and a host of other gear. By nightfall No. 3 A.C.S. had established a temporary camp in a bivouac area half a mile from their planned camp site and its equipment was spread out en route, some of it bogged down in sodden canefields.

Enemy paratroop landings were expected and the squadron was given the additional task of manning 2,500 yards of perimeter. Engine drivers and other personnel from the squadron had to undertake responsibility for the running and maintenance of railway yards and engine sheds at San Jose. They took over these duties on 17th December and also began

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[5] Sqn Ldr A. B. Overend, 255196. Comd 11 Works Supply Unit 1943-44; 61 Airfield Construction Wing 1944-45. Architect; of Melbourne; b. Launceston, Tas, 15 Oct 1909.

[6] LAC W. E. Barham, 163039. 3 Maintenance Works Sqn and 3 Airfield Construction Sqn. Labourer; of Wollongong, NSW; b. Nowra, NSW, 3 May 1927. Killed in action 15 Dec 1944. (On enlistment he had advanced his age by 2 years.)

running the electric supply and water services of the town. The men got little sleep because of the constant day and night enemy air raids. Morale, however, remained high and plant operators refused to seek cover until it was clear that the enemy were about to attack in the immediate vicinity.

Working side by side with an American engineer battalion No. 3 completed the construction of the first airfield on Mindoro on 19th December, one day ahead of the planned date. Transport aircraft landed early next day and in the afternoon the troops were elated by the arrival of American aircraft of the 8th Fighter Group.

Late in the afternoon of the 26th December, an enemy force consisting of two battleships, four cruisers and eight destroyers, accompanied by fifteen troop-carrying ships was sighted off the coast. The enemy naval force was part of the *Fifth Fleet* with headquarters in Saigon, French Indo-China, and the force had sortied across the South China Sea from Camranh Bay. American bombers, fighters and torpedo boats attacked as the enemy fleet began shelling the beach, while enemy aircraft bombed and strafed at low altitude. Every aircraft that could fly took off for the attack from the two airfields at San Jose.

Members of the R.A.A.F. construction squadron left their camp area to occupy defensive positions against an expected paratroop operation. They came under shell fire at 11 p.m. when the enemy barrage lifted to Hill Field. Australian volunteers manned trucks which they drove under heavy fire to the beach transporting bombs and moving infantry to battle stations. The enemy fleet left soon after midnight after losing one destroyer sunk and suffering heavy damage to other naval units. The Americans lost two Mitchells and 29 fighter aircraft during the engagement. Sixteen of the aircrew were picked up in emergency life-rafts next day.

Major Pat Long, an American who was at Mindoro during this engagement recounted an incident in which an unknown member of the Australian construction squadron distinguished himself by his coolness and devotion to a self-imposed duty during the Japanese naval bombardment. "When the attack commenced," said Long, "an airman walked into the operations room and asked the U.S. officer-in-charge if he could be of any help, adding that he had his bulldozer outside. His offer was readily accepted and the airman, who was hatless, proceeded to fill in the shell holes on the strip and remove crashed aircraft while shells were falling around him. He was thus instrumental in saving numbers of aircraft from crashing on the strip."

The following day, a check of No. 3 revealed that, apart from a few cases of slight "shell shock" no casualties had been suffered. A small enemy force had landed north of San Jose and another to the south of the town, but these were easily held by the American troops. The Australians went on with their construction work. Large craters in the camp area and airstrip and the presence of unexploded bombs handicapped progress, but by 30th December the construction of Elmore Field was completed within the specified time.

Mindoro's capacity as a base for air force units exceeded expectations and General Whitehead decided to build more airfields there.[7] He could thus bring forward more squadrons, including heavy bombardment squadrons, to Mindoro from Leyte where the airfield situation, due to boggy conditions, had proved to be inadequate for land-based aircraft needs. From this forward base the Americans struck at Luzon in force to prepare for the invasion of the island. Between September 1944 and January 1945 practically all the aircraft that the enemy sent into the Philippines had been wiped out.[8]

While General MacArthur's spearhead fought engagements with a desperate enemy in and around Mindoro, the Thirteenth Air Force and First T.A.F. from bases in Noemfoor and Morotai kept up a continuous onslaught against the by-passed enemy in Celebes, Halmahera and the Vogelkop peninsula. During December First T.A.F. was reinforced by the arrival at Morotai of Nos. 31 and 452 Squadrons from Darwin. No. 31's Beaufighters flew from Coomalie Creek airfield, Northern Territory, via Merauke and Noemfoor to Morotai, arriving on 7th December. This move was accomplished without incident but No. 452 Squadron which left Sattler on 16th December lost a pilot who was killed in a landing at Merauke. Weather delayed their movement from Merauke and they did not arrive at Morotai until 21st December.

Meanwhile, No. 31 Squadron on 9th December had carried out its first operation from Morotai. It was assigned a strike against Jolo Island in the Philippines. Flying at extreme range, fourteen Beaufighters, led by Squadron Leader Boyd, attacked enemy troops, stores and a jetty on the island. The crews reported hits on anti-aircraft positions, but could not see results of their attack on the waterfront and town because of smoke and dust. One of the Beaufighters was hit in the fuselage by anti-aircraft fire and another swung and was extensively damaged when landing at Morotai. On the same day Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron led by Wing Commander Thompson were over Mindanao for the purpose of attacking a radar station but the target could not be found. The area they covered seemed to be deserted and the roadways unused, so they came back without even firing their guns. Another flight from the squadron flew to Pulo Anno Island to make a rocket attack on a radar station there. However, when they arrived over the island which is midway between Morotai and Palau they found that American marines were in occupation of it and no attack was made.

During the next three days Beaufighters of both squadrons were switched to Celebes where they bombed and strafed Menado town and

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[7] Other strips completed by the Australian construction sqn at Mindoro before it left for Morotai to take part in the Borneo operations were "Maguire Field", 7,000 ft long and "Murtha Drome" also 7,000 ft long. The sqn also built 8 miles of main metal roads and 20 miles of branch and side roads; planned and designed a 200-ft span suspension bridge for which it put in the foundations; built hospitals, quartermasters' stores, camps, petrol dumps, washing plants, wells and water systems.

[8] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol. II, p. 424: General Kawabe.

radar stations. Heavy anti-aircraft fire was encountered by four of them which attacked Langoan airfield on the 12th, and three of them were damaged. They managed, however, to destroy an enemy medium bomber on the ground.

Major-General Streett, in a determined effort to destroy enemy installations on Halmahera, directed his own and First T.A.F. squadrons to carry out a four-day blitz on them in the period 22nd-25th December. Cobby mustered a total of 384 Kittyhawk and 129 Beaufighter sorties in this operation, concentrating especially on the airfields and installations around Galela and Gurua Bay. On the first day the three squadrons of No. 81 Wing attacked Lolobata and Hatetabako. Each pilot had to be on the target at his allotted time and then get away immediately because there were so many aircraft coming in to attack the area. Several Kittyhawks were hit by anti-aircraft fire and one from No. 80 Squadron, piloted by Flight Sergeant Tothill,[9] flicked during a strafing run, struck trees and crashed into the bay. Australian and American aircraft were over the target all day. A total of 285 sorties were completed during which 250 tons of demolition and incendiary bombs were dropped, together with napalm fire bombs and rockets in an area measuring not more than four square miles. In addition, Streett's bombers and fighters meted out a terrific battering to all enemy staging areas in Celebes and Ceram.

In spite of this onslaught, the Japanese with extraordinary persistence still managed to run the gauntlet with single aircraft which appeared over Morotai at night to harass the Allies. Two enemy raiders were over Morotai on Christmas Eve and one was shot down by a Spitfire of the newly-arrived No. 452 Squadron. The two enemy aircraft came over at about 10 o'clock. Anti-aircraft fire and searchlights engaged the first one but did not succeed in preventing the attack and bombs were dropped. The anti-aircraft barrage prevented an attack being made on it by fighters. The second enemy plane came in immediately afterwards and Flying Officer Pretty,[1] disregarding the anti-aircraft fire, attacked it setting it on fire. The searchlights then lost the enemy plane but Pretty could still see it and in two further attacks sent it down in flames. The action was seen by thousands of Allied and Australian troops and cheers rang out on all sides.

Cobby was anxious to move as many as possible of his squadrons and the supporting units to Morotai but was being frustrated at every turn by the lack of transport. By 27th December he had managed to bring the whole of his Advanced Headquarters to Morotai and the air elements and operational staff of No. 78 Wing arrived on 19th and 20th December and were based on Wama airfield. But, because of the lack of adequate transport, the squadrons at Morotai were operating with a minimum of

[9] F-Sgt C. C. Tothill, 429003; 80 Sqn. Clerk; of Prospect, SA; b. Prospect, 6 Aug 1918. Killed in action 22 Dec 1944.

[1] F-O J. A. Pretty, 409220. 64 and 452 Sqns. Clerk; of West Brunswick, Vic; b. Ascot Vale, Vic, 12 Jan 1923.

staff and equipment for maintenance. They had been moved to Morotai on an air echelon basis. The squadrons could work at a high pitch of intensity for perhaps a month but if the second echelons had not arrived by the end of that period there would be insufficient maintenance and stores to keep the aircraft in the air. Writing to Bostock in December, Cobby said "lack of transport always delays the arrival of the main body and heavy equipment. The result is obvious but a cure cannot be found."[2]

By January, First T.A.F. had some 3,000 men at Morotai, and their activities were handicapped. The movement of men between working and living areas was difficult and bush timber for use in the erection of camp buildings could not be carted. Food was far from satisfactory there being little variety with sugar and bread frequently in short supply. Squadron reports made reference to these difficulties, and that of No. 31 Squadron noted, that "general disgust was expressed at the state of this camp site . . . squadron morale is high under the circumstances, but at present considerable frustration and bewilderment is felt by all ranks at the lack of cooperation and appreciation of difficulties". Conditions at Noemfoor, where the bulk of No. 81 Wing remained, were much better. Eggs, butter, fresh meat and even fresh potatoes were available.

Cobby had reiterated his demands for air transport, urging that it should be allotted to his control. He had said, in a letter to Bostock on 8th October, that it was a serious problem which would not permit time for protracted discussions. The urgent demands of the commander of a tactical air force, which depended on high mobility, urgent re-supply and reinforcement, could not be satisfied by schedules laid down thousands of miles away. The Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces, he said, would control their own transport, "while my command will be left with the possibility of scant consideration for forward operations".

By October of 1944 the R.A.A.F. had eight transport squadrons (Nos. 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40 and 41) all of which were equipped with Dakota aircraft except No. 37 which had Lodestars, No. 40, Sunderlands, and No. 41, Martin Mariners.

None of the Australian transport squadrons had been assigned to MacArthur's command; they were controlled by Air Force Headquarters from Melbourne. Cobby had, therefore, in November 1944, when his transport needs were critical, signalled to Air Force Headquarters asking that No. 33 Squadron should be allotted to his command and move from Milne Bay to Noemfoor. R.A.A.F. Headquarters replied that it was impossible to send No. 33 Squadron or any other transport squadron to First T.A.F. Cobby, feeling that his problem was not understood, again made strong representations, pointing out that the refusal to allot him a fixed number of air transports "precludes all possibility of planning forward moves as we will not know how many transports will be made available or when". Cobby's signal continued: "I respectfully submit no field commander can plan movement of even smallest unit under his command unless he definitely

[2] AOC 1st TAF, Tactical Appreciation for Dec 1944.

knows amount of transportation media available. Situation as it now stands is that we can give no guarantee to 13 Air Force when we will be able to complete concentration or to what degree we can be operational at successive locations."

While Cobby's difficulty could be appreciated, the move to Morotai was not now so urgent because airfield construction at Leyte had been unsatisfactory and as a result the movement forward of the Fifth Air Force had been considerably delayed. Moreover, although R.A.A.F. Headquarters controlled the transport squadrons, they could not be used exclusively for air force requirements, because the R.A.A.F. had to meet all the normal air transport needs of the Australian military and naval forces, in addition to urgent tactical requirements when requested by MacArthur's headquarters.

In December General Kenney informed Air Vice-Marshal Jones that "two operations will be mounted towards the end of the first quarter of 1945 by the Australian Imperial forces . . . in the Netherlands East Indies". The First Tactical Air Force, he added, was to carry out the air garrison role, and in order to support it three air transport squadrons were needed in time to be operational at Morotai not later than 1st March 1945. Jones decided to send one squadron only—No. 34—to Morotai. However, in the meantime, because of the delay at Leyte, Thirteenth Air Force had a temporary surplus of air transport and Streett provided Cobby with a considerable number of Dakota lifts which enabled him to bring forward units from Darwin, Northern Territory, Noemfoor, Finschhafen and as far away as Townsville, Queensland.

In addition to the deficiencies in air transport, there was a grave shortage of shipping space to move R.A.A.F. units. In December 1944, a total of 7,465 members of the R.A.A.F. and 56,000 tons of R.A.A.F. equipment were awaiting shipment to forward areas.

Nos. 1, 2, 8, and 6 Airfield Construction Squadrons, for example, were at Sydney awaiting shipment. No. 6 was urgently needed at Jacquinot Bay, New Britain, where everything was in readiness for the construction of airfields, after the occupation of the area by Australian troops. The other three squadrons were bound for Morotai. Bostock said that the fighting efficiency of the R.A.A.F. and particularly of Northern Command was being seriously affected because of the difficulty of moving units and rear echelons forward from the mainland.

The War Cabinet considered the problem at a meeting in December and again in January and, although it made recommendations to MacArthur which, if adopted, might ease the situation, nothing concrete could be done because the shipping position throughout the Pacific was critical, and priority was being given to the operations in the Philippines.

In the first week of January 1945, another assault force of MacArthur's command gathered off Leyte Island and by 9th January it had threaded its way through the Philippines and landed on Luzon, the main island of the archipelago. Only two Japanese aircraft appeared over Lingayen

Gulf when the landing was made. By this time, the Fifth American Air Force was well established on Mindoro and in three weeks it had practically destroyed the remaining Japanese air strength in the Philippines. On 13th December, 243 aircraft had been seen at the Clark Field air centre—the main Japanese air base—but on the 11th January only thirty-four serviceable aircraft remained. The landing at Lingayen was followed by intensive Allied air activity by land and carrier-based aircraft in the Philippines, Formosa and Ryukus areas. According to Admiral Fukudome[3] the landing at Lingayen "was wholly unexpected on our side". Japanese aircraft, he said, had seen the fleet off Mindoro and the belief was that the landing would be attempted around Manila Bay or points to the south "so we were taken by surprise when they appeared in Lingayen and started landing there".

The landing had caught every major hostile force in motion except one division in the central Luzon plain. The Japanese, harassed by guerillas and attacked constantly from the air, drove north, south, east and west in confusion. They became tangled in traffic jams on the roads and generally dissipated what chance they might have had to repel the landing force.[4] Yamashita had one armoured division at his disposal, but American air units bombed and knocked it out of action and all other units north of Manila were driven off the roads into the mountains by bombing and strafing aircraft. Since it was abundantly clear to the Japanese Imperial Headquarters that any further aircraft sent to the archipelago would be destroyed, the flow of aircraft reinforcements ceased and enemy air defences retired to the north. From that point it was only necessary for the Americans to subdue the army garrison to complete the conquest of the Philippines.

By 22nd January, Kenney had both bombers and fighters established ashore at a new airfield at Lingayen from which he sent missions out to bomb Formosa. On 27th January the American ground forces had seized the six airfields at Clark air base. By 3rd February the 1st Cavalry Division had entered Manila, and on 23rd February it penetrated the old walled city area—the "Intrumuros". Meanwhile paratroops had landed and seized the island fortress of Corregidor, scene of the last stand by the Americans in 1942.

Manila was the culminating action of the whole campaign of the South-West Pacific Area. In twelve months MacArthur had advanced from Saidor in New Guinea to Lingayen Gulf, Luzon—a distance of 2,300 miles—compared with a total advance of 400 miles, from Milne Bay to Saidor, in the previous two years.

For the landing at Lingayen and the ensuing operations on Luzon, the Fifth Air Force, reinforced for this operation by units of the First Marine Wing, had been the air assault force, while the Thirteenth and the R.A.A.F. had again been allotted subordinate roles as "supporting forces".

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[3] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol II, p. 506.

[4] General George Marshall, *Report to Secretary of War, 1943-1945*, p. 78.

In general, Allied Air Forces in the South-West Pacific had been ordered to "intensify air activities against hostile installations".

In a letter dated 5th January to the commanders of all air forces, General Kenney outlined probable operations and dispositions for the first three months of 1945. After the Luzon operations, large air forces would be established there for future operations to the north. Additional garrisons were to be established in the Visayan-Mindanao area for use in the occupation of the remainder of the Philippines, Palawan and the Sulu Archipelago, and to prepare for further operations to the south-west. Continuous support would be given from Morotai to defend flanks to the westward and to prepare for expected operations in the Netherlands East Indies. Support would be given to ground forces engaged in the occupation of New Britain and the Solomons. For the accomplishment of these tasks, Kenney proposed that his Fifth Air Force would be established in the Mindoro-Luzon area; Thirteenth Air Force in the Leyte-Samar area and later in other islands of the Visayas; the R.A.A.F. forces at Morotai, and the R.N.Z.A.F. in the Solomon Islands. Kenney stressed that the movement of all forces into position would be hindered by the limited means of transport and airfield capacity. Most airfields construction effort was being used in the forward areas of the Philippines and because of the shipping shortage, many units could not be expected to move until just before the start of operations to which they would be assigned.

While the centre of operations of South-West Pacific forces was moving forward in the Philippine Islands, First T.A.F., left far to the rear with the Thirteenth Air Force, was still maintaining a constant day-by-day air assault against by-passed enemy targets. While admitting that by-passed enemy forces had to be kept under surveillance, numbers of Australian pilots, including commanders of squadrons, began to question whether some of the targets they were sent to attack were worthwhile and to assert that the R.A.A.F. as a whole had now been assigned an unimportant role in the war.[5]

In the first week in January aircraft from four wings of First T.A.F. flew a total of 661 sorties against Halmahera, Celebes, Morotai and the Vogelkop area. Of these sorties No. 77 Wing flew 142; No. 78 flew 317; No. 81 flew 118; and No. 80 Wing flew 84. While MacArthur's assault convoy was en route to Lingayen Gulf, Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing were bombing and strafing Halmahera airfields and troop concentrations. On 1st January, Nos. 78 and 80 Squadrons each sent twelve aircraft to dive-bomb No. 2 strip at Galela. A majority of the bombs landed on the strip. The following day, thirty-six Kittyhawks attacked Lolobata and nearby Hatetabako. At the same time another twelve Kittyhawks dive-bombed and strafed an area inland from Wasile Bay, while four Spitfires of No. 452 Squadron set out to destroy an aircraft reported at Galela. Not finding it they made attacks on anti-aircraft positions. On 4th January seven Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron and eleven from No. 31 bombed and strafed

[5] Barry Commission, evidence.

the dispersal area at Sidate in Celebes. On the same day Kittyhawks of No. 80 Squadron scored direct hits on shipyards at Bangka Island and No. 75 Squadron strafed and hit "a possible transformer" half a mile south-west of Tanggari. After strafing runs Flying Officer Dudley[6] appeared to lose contact with his flight and was last seen three miles from Tondano.

On 5th January twenty-one Beaufighters together with Lightnings and Mitchells of the Thirteenth Air Force, hit the Menado area both in the morning and in the afternoon. Buildings were destroyed and fires started. The attacking aircraft used napalm fire bombs weighing 100-lb and together with the 500-lb general purpose bombs and rockets they inflicted heavy damage. Napalm or jellied petrol, made by adding a chemical powder of aluminium naphthenates to petrol, was carried in belly tanks to which an igniting fuse was fixed. The belly tank was dropped just short of the objective area from an altitude of 75 to 100 feet. The mixture ignited as the tank broke and a sheet of intense flame covered the area. The napalm tended to cling to any surface and penetrated openings, and it was found to be most useful against dug-in positions and as a general incendiary against supply dumps, buildings and motor transport.

On 9th and 10th January all available aircraft of Nos. 77 and 78 Wings were assigned to a combined naval-air task against the main bivouac and supply area near Galela village. The operation was regarded as a training exercise since the area had been neutralised. Throughout the first day of the operation a total of sixty Kittyhawks from No. 78 Wing dropped seventy-seven 250-lb bombs and thirty-eight 500-lb bombs in the target area and suffered no damage except that one Kittyhawk crashed on landing.

On 13th January Group Captain Caldwell led twelve Spitfires of No. 452 Squadron in a strafing attack on targets on the north-western tip of Halmahera. They damaged a number of barges and strafed Miti airfield where they reported work in progress and the strip serviceable. On the same day, four other Spitfires, taking off in the afternoon for an intruder patrol over Halmahera, strafed huts and a barge. Flight Sergeant Stevenson,[7] who was flying as No. 2 to Warrant Officer Byrne,[8] disappeared over Ternate Island. Stevenson's radio was not working and no explanation could therefore be given for his disappearance. However, Byrne saw the aircraft off-shore in shallow water with its tail visible but the pilot missing. Natives later supplied information on Stevenson's fate. They said he was unhurt when he landed. The headman of Castela village offered him food and shelter, but meanwhile the Japanese had been informed, and he was taken prisoner to Forte Oranje in Ternate town where he was put under guard. Stevenson died later while a prisoner.

On the same day, four pilots of No. 80 Squadron were reported missing in a ferry flight from Noemfoor to Morotai. They were: Flying Officer

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[6] F-O U. N. Dudley, 410222; 75 Sqn. Farm labourer; of Tallygaroopna, Vic; b. Numurkah, Vic, 1 Mar 1919. Killed in action 4 Jan 1945.

[7] F-Sgt E. McL. Stevenson, 432589; 452 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Dubbo, NSW; b. Dubbo, 7 Nov 1924. Died while prisoner of war 14 Apr 1945.

[8] F-O J. R. Byrne, 412386. 129 and 452 Sqns. Farm labourer; of Mimosa, NSW; b. Young, NSW, 1 Oct 1922.

Hann,[9] Warrant Officer Waters,[1] and Flight Sergeants Parry[2] and King.[3] Weather conditions at the time were normal, but the aircraft were not fitted with belly tanks so that their time in the air was limited. Searches were made in Dutch New Guinea, Noemfoor and Halmahera, but without results. Meanwhile, Hann, King and Waters had come down off Talaud Islands, having overshot Morotai. They were captured by the Japanese and, on 23rd March, were killed at a special ceremony. For complicity in this crime, a number of Japanese were tried after the war and executed.[4]

The strikes against Celebes targets continued almost daily throughout January and at the end of the month No. 31 Squadron claimed it had destroyed 64 buildings, three coastal schooners, a bridge, an anti-aircraft position and a radio installation. On 27th, 28th, 29th and 30th January, Beaufighters and Kittyhawks combined in a concentrated four-day campaign against enemy personnel areas at Tomohon and Menado. Some of the Kittyhawks were damaged by bomb splinters and a Beaufighter was holed by anti-aircraft fire. Naval depth-charges were dropped by Beaufighters in some of these attacks, but, because they had to be dropped from a high altitude, targets were not hit accurately. Moreover, it was found that there was not sufficient difference in blast effect to justify the adoption of depth-charges as an alternative to the 500-lb bomb.

The activities of No. 81 Wing which was still at Noemfoor showed a pronounced decline in January. Sorties which in December had totalled 1,055, in January had fallen to 384. Lacking worthwhile targets the squadrons of this wing trained extensively. They carried out a number of watercraft sweeps in early January and flew dawn and dusk patrols around Noemfoor. On 7th January the wing became non-operational, pending its move to Morotai, and, although the men of the squadrons lived in daily expectation of moving, it was not until the latter part of the month that the advanced headquarters was established at the new base.

As often happens in war during quiet periods or when fighting men feel they have been assigned to an inferior role, discontent began to show in First Tactical Air Force. There was a widespread feeling among pilots that they had been assigned to unspectacular drudgery, and that the lives of pilots were being endangered on military undertakings the results of which were making no great contribution to killing Japanese and winning the war. Although not stated in the phraseology of von Clausewitz' military writings, the pilots were expressing the classical military proposition that the tactical or strategic gains to be expected from any operation must not be less than the expected losses in achieving those gains.

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[9] F-O F. L. Hann, 411448; 80 Sqn. Shop assistant; of Hamilton, NSW; b. Cairns, Qld, 25 Nov 1919. Killed while prisoner of war 23 Mar 1945.

[1] W-O P. Waters, 410186; 80 Sqn. Leather merchant; of Hampton, Vic; b. Black Rock, Vic, 20 Sep 1922. Killed while prisoner of war 23 Mar 1945.

[2] F-Sgt R. W. Parry, 434265; 80 Sqn. Painter and decorator; of Bundaberg, Qld; b. Bundaberg, 14 Sep 1924. Missing and presumed dead 13 Jan 1945.

[3] F-Sgt L. N. King, 434344; 80 Sqn. Telephone mechanic; of Canberra; b. Sydney, 29 Sep 1923. Killed while prisoner of war 23 Mar 1945.

[4] RAAF Casualty Section Report 166/112.

No statement had been made to indicate to the Australian forces that the American staffs had decided that Australian forces should not go into the Philippines; yet the Australians very soon sensed that fact and resented it. The feeling that they were being left out of the more important operations was not confined to the Australians. Admiral Halsey had to intercede with MacArthur on behalf of the 1st Marine Air Group. Halsey said that Kenney "when not keeping it idle, was assigning it to missions far below its capacity".[5] In any case, by January, the Japanese *Fourth Air Army* had practically ceased to exist and neither the Fifth nor the Thirteenth Air Force was able to find much in the way of air-to-air combat.

Air Commodore Cobby was well aware that the targets offering were not very profitable. Everything within reach of Noemfoor was more or less flattened. He would have liked to see his force employed farther north in combat against enemy air forces, but he knew that the Americans had decided that since they had been thrown out of the Philippines they wished to return there without outside assistance. Moreover, when he had been appointed to command First Tactical Air Force he had been given very strong directions both from the Chief of the Air Staff and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock that he should do his utmost to cooperate smoothly with the American forces.

The Americans, when they were moving into the Philippines, were very sensitive about their long, exposed flank. This flank had to be neutralised and kept neutralised, and the reaction of the Americans to that situation was to employ saturation air raids. The American forces considered a much greater air effort to be necessary against objectives than the Australians did. They believed that the liberal employment of air power would save lives in the long run. The Thirteenth Air Force was particularly sensitive about the airfields on Halmahera and wanted a maximum effort against them.

During the advance along the northern New Guinea coast in 1944, when the Australian Kittyhawk squadrons were in the van of operations, the squadron commanders were told quite bluntly that they must maintain as high a rate of effort as the American squadrons, and, by a reorganisation of these squadrons, they had been able to reach and maintain that rate of effort. There was an ample supply of aircraft available in New Guinea at the time, but a chronic shortage of airfield space in forward areas; and any Australian squadron which could not maintain an effort comparable to that of the American squadrons could not expect to remain in the battle. The emphasis appeared to be on sorties and flying hours rather than results. By the end of 1944 the R.A.A.F. squadrons had been left far behind the main battle; yet there was a distinct tendency for a maximum output of sorties and flying hours to be maintained, even though the targets were no longer as lucrative, and some pilots were asking why they should be sent on missions where the results might mean loss of aircrew for very little damage to the enemy.

[6] W. F. Halsey, *Admiral Halsey's Story* (1947), p. 231.

It was against this background that the youthful Group Captain Arthur, aged 24, arrived at Noemfoor in December to replace Group Captain Steege as commander of No. 81 Wing. He quickly came to the conclusion that the targets were not worthwhile, and that the R.A.A.F. was wasting time, endangering its people's lives and wasting bombs and ammunition. After flying on one operation Arthur cancelled the operations scheduled for the three following days, and, when asked for an explanation by First T.A.F. headquarters, replied by signal that "indications were more suitable and less expensive targets were available".

Having decided that the operations at Noemfoor were not worthwhile, he drew up an "operational balance sheet" and concluded that the only things of value to the enemy which had been destroyed were motor transport and barges, and that the wing had lost 11 men and 15 aircraft to destroy 12 barges and six motor transport. His detailed balance sheet appears on the next page.

Arthur felt strongly that something should be done to correct the situation and flew to Morotai where he obtained an interview with Air Commodore Cobby. He showed him his "balance sheet", and Cobby was sympathetic. He thanked Arthur for the figures and decided to examine the operations not only of No. 81 Wing but of Nos. 78 and 77 as well. Cobby believed that the targets "were not very payable". However, after examining the figures he did not agree with Arthur's contention that excessive losses had been sustained by the squadrons. In a tactical appreciation written to Bostock a few days later he reported: "An impression existed among units of First T.A.F. that our aircraft were taking more damage from ack-ack than the targets warranted. Such an impression is dangerous to morale and in order to dispel it, if untrue, I ordered an analysis to be made. It demonstrated that whilst flak is encountered on a high percentage of sorties, our losses are really at a very low rate." The figures, published in the First T.A.F. Intelligence Summary of 4th February, showed that one aircraft was destroyed by anti-aircraft fire in November 1944 for a total of 862 sorties. The figures for December were 2,249 sorties with two aircraft destroyed, and for January, 2,037 sorties for five destroyed. However, Arthur was concerned not with losses in relation to sorties, but losses in relation to results. In other words, was the effort worth it?

Other leaders who felt keenly that First T.A.F. was not contributing effectively to the prosecution of the war included Group Captain Caldwell, commander of No. 80 Wing; Wing Commander Cresswell, wing leader of No. 81 Wing; Wing Commander Waddy, commander of No. 80 Squadron; and Squadron Leader Grace, commander of No. 82 Squadron.

Caldwell had found that the spirits of his pilots had risen when they had first moved to Morotai from Darwin, because they hoped then that they would become engaged in air fighting, and their spirits remained up until it became evident that there would be little prospect of meeting the enemy in the air. Caldwell believed that the strafing operations his pilots carried out in lieu of air combat were not likely to produce results which

would justify the loss of aircraft. He interviewed Air Vice-Marshal Jones early in February and told him that he (Caldwell) recently "had wasted a lot of time . . . that he had not done any fighting in the air . . . and that

81 WING OPERATIONAL BALANCE SHEET

LIABILITIES

(Scale of effort)

| Item | Oct | Nov | Total | Dec | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hours flown | 1,967 | 948 | 2,915 | | |
| Fuel consumed | 59,010 | 28,440 | 87,450 | | |
| No. of sorties | 755 | 370 | 1,125 | | |
| Bombs lbs. Ex. | 241,700 | 186,450 | 428,150 | | |
| Rounds Ammo, Exp. | 359,571 | 133,580 | 493,151 | | |
| A/C lost | 12 | 3 | 15 | | |
| Pilots lost | 8 | 3 | 11 | | |
| A/C damaged | | | | | |
| 75% | 0 | 1 | 1 | | |
| 50% | 1 | 1 | 2 | | |
| 25% | 1 | 1 | 2 | | |
| 10% | 5 | 5 | 10 | | |

ASSETS

(Damage inflicted on enemy)

| Item | Oct | Nov | Total | Dec | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Aircraft destroyed | — | — | — | — | — |
| „ damaged (on ground) | — | — | — | — | — |
| Barges destroyed | 6 | 6 | 12 | 14 | 26 |
| „ damaged | 32 | 18 | 50 | 22 | 72 |
| Fuel dumps destroyed | 16 | 7 | 23 | 13 | 36 |
| Ammo „ „ | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Stores „ „ | 8 | 8 | 16 | 12 | 28 |
| M/T destroyed | 5 | 1 | 6 | 4 | 10 |
| Buildings destroyed | 13 | 4 | 17 | 14 | 31 |
| *Details of A/C losses* | | | | | |
| Enemy action (proven) | 4 | | | | |
| Weather | 1 | | | | |
| Unknown | 10 | | | | |
| | 15 | | | | |

30th December 1944
Senior Administrative Officer
No. 81 Wing Headquarters

future operations were unlikely to be worth while". The pilots, he said, were "brassed off" because of the inactivity.

There were other causes of complaint at Noemfoor and Morotai. Some pilots, far from being resentful of flying too much on profitless operations, complained that they did not get enough flying to do. Some resented

newspaper reports which tended to exaggerate and "glamorise" their activities. There was also some disorganisation, caused by lack of transport, which prevented the bringing together of various echelons of units. It was difficult to prepare camp areas, provide water and motor transport to move men to their places of duty. The situation was difficult in December and it became progressively worse in January, when several thousand more men of the Australian Air Force arrived at Morotai by ship without supplies or transport to maintain them.

CHAPTER 24

# FIRST T.A.F. AND NORTH-WESTERN AREA, JANUARY-APRIL 1945

IN January 1945 the Japanese forces in New Guinea, the Solomons, the Indies, and Burma, were in a critical situation which was growing daily worse. They had made their major counter-thrust in the Philippines, employing their utmost resources, and yet had not managed to do more than cause a slight delay in the American operations. The Japanese air forces had been reduced to suicide squadrons, Japan's navy had been sunk or immobilised, her merchant shipping had been almost wiped out. Whole armies were isolated, and Japan's domestic production was sliding rapidly downhill. Yet in January the Japanese people had not abandoned hope of victory.

At an Imperial conference during the month the Japanese leaders had decided on a "bloody and protracted struggle in the homeland, the Nansei Shoto, Manchuria and China".[1] The SHO-GO plan which had failed to achieve its objectives in the Philippines and had led to the defeat of the Japanese navy and the destruction of most of the air force employed, was replaced by the KETSU operation, the principal purpose of which was to engage the Americans in strategic areas, exacting heavy casualties, and through this blood-letting, breaking their will to continue the fight. The Japanese believed that Okinawa would be the next point invaded and this was one of the strategically-important areas in which American blood would be made to flow. Desperate measures were planned. The suicide-plane operations would be fully employed and by this means it was hoped that between 300 and 400 American ships would be sunk. There was talk of defending Tokyo to the last, especially the area around the Imperial Palace where it was hoped that soldiers would hold out in underground positions for more than a year.

After 1st March no further supplies were sent to ground forces outside the home islands. There was no fuel for the navy, so the remaining ships were put out of commission and navy personnel turned over to aviation.[2] Admiral Toyoda[3] felt strongly that to continue the war would be extremely difficult. The turning point, he believed, was the loss of the Philippines when the fuel situation became acute because American control over the South China Sea completely cut off the shipping lanes to the south. After March, the Japanese no longer attempted to send tankers through this sea. In the latter part of March all the northward-bound convoys had been sunk and Superfortresses were laying mines in the Shimonoseki Strait, causing the suspension of sea traffic even in the Inland Sea area. There had been a catastrophic drop in domestic production of war

[1] Colonel Hattori (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ, Tokyo).

[2] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Interrogations of Japanese Officials*, Vol I, p. 284, Vice-Adm Weneker.

[3] US Bombing Survey, *Interrogations*, Vol II, p. 315.

materials and supplies, caused by the lack of materials from overseas, and the Superfortress raids from the Marianas which were destroying factories and disrupting communications. By withdrawing fighters from overseas, however, the Japanese were able to put up strong fighter opposition to American air attacks on the home islands. During five raids on Nagoya the Superfortresses were met by a total of 1,731 fighter attacks and suffered severe losses. First priority had been given to the bombing of the Japanese aircraft industry, and the Japanese, realising that the Americans intended to destroy the aircraft industry, attempted to disperse the factories. However, the dispersal was delayed because of the necessity of providing more and more planes for the Pacific war, and when dispersal could no longer be avoided, it was too late. The drop in aircraft production was precipitous.

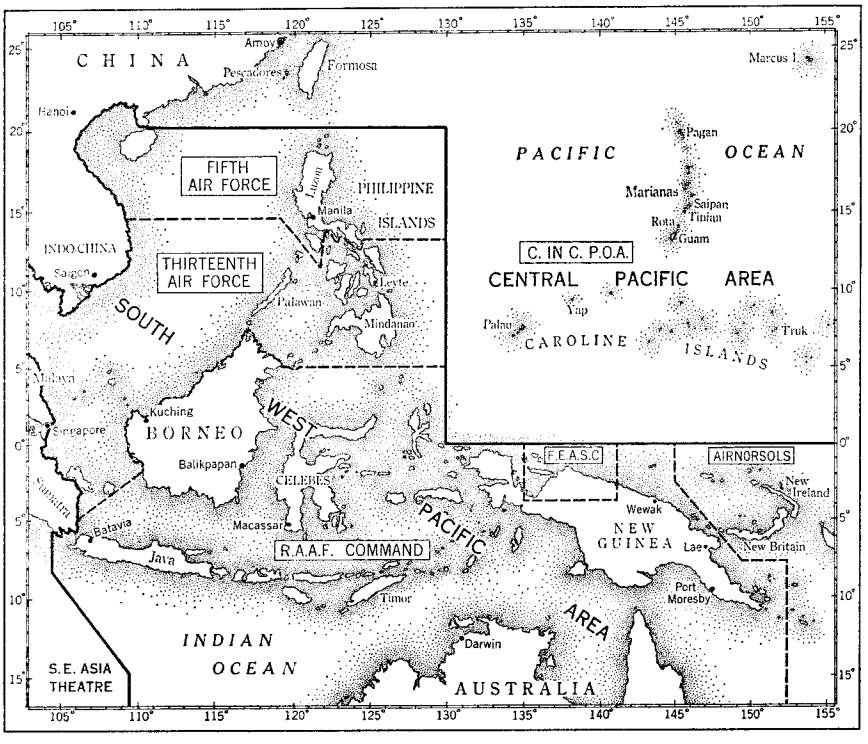
On 16th February an American naval task force stood off Japan and sent 1,200 carrier aircraft into the Tokyo area, where air reaction, although heavy, was largely ineffective. Some 300 enemy planes were destroyed for a loss of 29 American. Three days later the American V Marine Corps landed on Iwo Jima, a small island 775 miles from the main Japanese island of Honshu.

While the Superfortresses continued their assault on Japan proper, the aircraft of First T.A.F. continued to range over the Moluccas, Celebes and elsewhere in the Netherlands East Indies. At this time enemy air strength in the whole of the South-West Pacific Area had fallen to an estimated 161 aircraft, the lowest level since the beginning of the war. Against this the R.A.A.F. had 663 and the U.S. Far East Air Force 2,791.

With the main battle of the Philippines over, MacArthur was developing a series of moves which aimed to free the southern Philippines, the Netherlands East Indies and British Borneo of hostile forces and re-establish "constituted government" there. The basic plan for these operations became known as the MONTCLAIR plan. The starting time for each operation was dependent on progress made in the operations in Luzon. Progress there was so rapid that the first of the MONTCLAIR operations was launched against the island of Palawan on 28th February. After two days of heavy air bombardment over Palawan itself, the southern Philippines and other near-by enemy-held areas, elements of the Eighth American Army landed at Puerto Princesa. Besides the town, two airfields were captured from which Allied aircraft could patrol across the South China Sea. These two airfields had been an important Japanese link in their system of air communications between the Philippines and Malay-Singapore. In January, Liberators had heavily bombed other links in this chain—Miri and Jesselton, in Borneo. Throughout February, the two airfields at Balikpapan, Manggar and Sepinggang, as well as Labuan, Tarakan, Sanga Sanga and other Borneo targets had been visited by bombing planes which increased their blows as assault day at Palawan approached. On the day before the landing both the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces "saturated" the target area with explosives and fire bombs. The result of all this

preparation was that an American regimental combat team was able to land unopposed.

The Thirteenth Air Force, the advanced headquarters of which had now been established at Leyte, was the air assault force for the Palawan operation and, after the landing, it established squadrons and service units at Puerto Princesa. The Fifth Air Force assisted the Thirteenth, but the R.A.A.F. was given no direct part, being ordered merely to continue "its present missions in the Netherlands East Indies".




Ten days after the landing at Palawan the next stage of the Philippines operation was mounted. This was the seizure of Zamboanga on the south-west tip of Mindanao. The purpose of this landing was to control the approaches to north-east Borneo and to support the consolidation of central and eastern Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago. This operation was preceded by a three-day naval bombardment and heavy air strikes. In the fifteen days before the landing, American bombers dropped about 950 tons of high explosives and 15,000 gallons of napalm mixture on the town and its immediate vicinity. There was evidence that enemy ground forces could strongly resist a landing and it was therefore necessary to eliminate this expected resistance by air bombardment. The bom-

bardment was successful and the 41st American Division met only light opposition, though heavy fighting followed in the foothills for some weeks.

There was no change in the role allotted to First Tactical Air Force in February. General Streett's orders[4] at the beginning of the month were:

> Continue the neutralisation and destruction of the enemy and his installations in the Celebes, Ceram-Ambon and Halmahera areas.
>
> Attack targets in the Mindanao and Sulu archipelago areas as requested by this [13th Air Force] headquarters.
>
> Assist in the air defence of Morotai by providing daylight air cover and alert and sufficient night interceptors to augment night air defence system.
>
> Support the 31st Infantry division on Morotai as requested.

In the main, Australian Kittyhawks and Spitfires were used against Halmahera and Morotai targets while the Beaufighters handled Celebes and Ambon-Ceram.

On the 1st February, eight Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron attacked a Japanese army personnel area at Tomohon. This attack was carried out at about 12.40 p.m., the aircraft dropping depth-charges and 500-lb fragmentation clusters. The Japanese succeeded in shooting down a Beaufighter piloted by Flight Lieutenant Taylor[5] with Flying Officer Packham[6] as navigator. This aircraft was seen by the others to crash on a plateau about one mile south of the town and break up. Anti-aircraft fire was so fierce during the attack that the leader of the mission, Flight Lieutenant Provost[7], ordered the rest of the formation to rendezvous at a point some distance from the target from where course was set for base. Another Beaufighter in this attack (Pilot Officer McGuigan[8] and Flight Sergeant Lewis[9]) was also lost. It was last seen heading over the target area but failed to return to base. A third machine was hit in the fuselage behind the navigator's cockpit. Later in the afternoon twelve Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron accompanied by twelve from No. 80 attacked the same targets, dropping incendiaries and napalm bombs. The crews reported seeing the wreck of Taylor's aircraft.

One of the biggest batterings by Australian squadrons in a one-day series of attacks was inflicted on the town of Tondano in Celebes on 11th February. This massed attack was delivered by 60 Kittyhawks and 28 Beaufighters using depth-charges and fragmentation, high-explosive and napalm bombs. The object was to destroy Japanese ground forces. Because of the continued bombardment by Allied aircraft, the Japanese

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[4] Letter of Instruction No. 10, Thirteenth Air Force, Feb 1945.

[5] F-Lt D. R. Taylor, 416465; 31 Sqn. Draftsman; of Prospect, SA; b. Port Lincoln, SA, 13 Jan 1920. Killed in action 1 Feb 1945.

[6] F-O K. Packham, 436776; 31 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Swanbourne, WA; b. Perth, 1 Sep 1923. Killed in action 1 Feb 1945.

[7] F-Lt R. A. Provost, 406060; 31 Sqn. Civil servant; of Mt Lawley, WA; b. Perth, WA, 5 Mar 1919.

[8] P-O W. R. McGuigan, 427717; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of Wickepin, WA; b. Narrogin, WA, 30 Jul 1924. Killed in action 1 Feb 1945.

[9] F-Sgt A. E. Lewis, 431362; 31 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Camperdown, Vic; b. Red Cliffs, Vic, 22 May 1925. Killed in action 1 Feb 1945.

had begun to move from the big centres to smaller towns and villages. Natives had given information that there were a large number of Japanese in Tondano.

Six squadrons of First T.A.F.—Nos. 22, 30 and 31 (Beaufighters) and Nos. 75, 78 and 80 (Kittyhawks)—took part, attacking in five waves and dropping twenty-six tons of explosives and incendiaries. The first wave, comprising forty Kittyhawks, led by Wing Commander Atherton, silenced anti-aircraft positions. Ten minutes later, another part of the town was hammered by nineteen Kittyhawks from No. 75 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant Andrew. These aircraft obliterated their target with high-explosive bombs. Then followed twenty-eight Beaufighters, led by Squadron Leader J. C. Black,[1] in three waves, dropping high-explosive and napalm bombs which added new fires to those already started by the Kittyhawks. Nine of these aircraft were from No. 22 Squadron which was making its first strike since December, after its conversion from Boston aircraft.

Many Beaufighters had been destroyed or damaged during January and February as a result of anti-aircraft fire or accidents. The high accident rate was attributed to difficulties in changing over from English-made to Australian-made machines. The Australian-made aircraft was fitted with non-locking tail wheels which caused them to swing to one side on landing.

On 16th February, when Beaufighters bombed a steel bridge at Gorontalo, direct hits sent a thirty-foot section crashing into the river. The attack was to have been made by fifteen aircraft, but six from No. 22 Squadron had to turn back to base because of heavy cloud and rain, and the raid was carried out by nine Beaufighters from No. 31 Squadron.

Squadron Leader Holloway[2] of No. 22, with Pilot Officer Genders[3] as navigator, crashed on 27th February when four Beaufighters attacked a bridge at Isimu, near Gorontalo. No hits were scored although several bombs fell close to the bridge. Holloway had just arrived at Morotai to command No. 22 Squadron. While making a particularly low attack at the head of his flight his wing tip hit some trees. The aircraft half rolled and crashed, the wreckage being scattered over 300 yards. It appeared certain that both men were killed but Genders survived the crash only to die, while a prisoner of war, some ten weeks later.

The intensity of attacks on Halmahera began to fall in early February. For the week ending the 9th, 193 Kittyhawks, 24 Spitfires and 2 Beaufighters attacked supply dumps, barges and buildings.

On 3rd February Nos. 78 and 80 Squadrons sent 53 Kittyhawks to Halmahera. Sixteen of them bombed Wasile pier area and eight dive-bombed anti-aircraft positions at Lolobata. At the latter, extremely heavy

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[1] Sqn Ldr J. C. Black, 470. 12 and 30 Sqns; comd 31 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Tranmere, SA; b. Adelaide, 29 Mar 1920.

[2] Sqn Ldr J. Holloway, 2631. Comd 22 Sqn 1945. Regular airman; of Glen Iris, Vic; b. Malvern, Vic, 7 Apr 1916. Killed in action 27 Feb 1945.

[3] F-O D. E. Genders, 437919; 22 Sqn. Articled clerk; of Burra, SA; b. Mt Gambier, SA, 16 May 1925. Died while prisoner of war 10 May 1945.

anti-aircraft fire, prevented the results of the attacks being seen. During the attacks on Halmahera on this day Wing Commander Atherton had his aircraft hit by anti-aircraft fire north of Hatetabako airfield. He managed to ditch the plane into Kau Bay. While in his dinghy he was subjected to fire but the shots fell short. A mortar shell fell harmlessly only seventy yards from the Catalina which came to his rescue. Another Kittyhawk in this mission was holed by anti-aircraft fire in the port mainplane, petrol tank, starboard mainplane and tyre, but the pilot, unhurt, returned to his base making a normal landing.

Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron carried out their first operations from Morotai on 10th February when Group Captain Caldwell led them on a reconnaissance over Halmahera. They strafed an enemy aircraft at Galela. The move of this squadron had been constantly delayed. Twenty-four aircraft had left Sattler on 6th February, twenty-three of these reaching Morotai on the 8th. The rest of the squadron came by air transport aircraft and by boat. The third squadron (No. 79) was also moved to Morotai during February, and before the end of the month had carried out a number of operational sorties.

The relative scarcity of payable targets, and a shortage of ammunition and bombs towards the end of February, dictated a reduction in the operational effort of First T.A.F. On 28th February the force had flown 1,324 sorties for the month, compared with the January total of 2,037. The reduction in the average effort for individual pilots is all the more pronounced by reason of the fact that in February twelve squadrons were engaged, compared with nine squadrons in January. No. 81 Wing, still at Noemfoor, did very little operational flying and Group Captain Arthur reported that although morale was "good", he considered that "a much higher standard will be achieved when active operations commence and personnel realise that they are taking an active operational part in the war".

On 20th February Cobby reported to Air Force Headquarters that the bomb-stock position had become critical. First T.A.F. had been forced to augment its supplies from Thirteenth Air Force stocks, but the Thirteenth Air Force was also running short. Under present operational intensity, said Cobby, explosive stocks were reduced to 7 days for 250-lb bombs and 40 days for 500-lb bombs, and, in order to place the supply position on a sound footing, a large supply of bombs from R.A.A.F. sources was essential. Air Force Headquarters replied that the bomb-supply situation had been critical for months because of the extremely heavy commitments in the European theatre. The latest advice from R.A.A.F. Overseas Headquarters, London, indicated that allocations of bombs to the R.A.A.F. for the six months from February would be less than estimated needs, but that negotiations were being continued on a high level.

During March, while the American Twentieth Air Force bombed Tokyo, the Fifth hit the China coast and aided in the mopping-up in Luzon; the Thirteenth Air Force struck at Borneo and the southern Philippines, and First T.A.F. continued its garrison duties from Morotai.

Statistically, First T.A.F.'s effort in March (1,341 sorties) was slightly greater than in February (1,324 sorties). However, a greater portion of the burden was now being carried by the Spitfire squadrons of No. 80 Wing, which mounted 521 sorties for the month, thus enabling the Kittyhawks and Beaufighters to prepare for the coming operations in Borneo.

Although no enemy planes were seen in the air by raiding Australian planes, the enemy anti-aircraft defences were still strong and numbers of aircraft were shot down, limped back to base in a damaged condition, or ditched in the sea from which the pilots were rescued by Catalinas.

From the 18th March, the air defence of Morotai, which until then had been the responsibility of the Thirteenth Air Force, was assigned to First T.A.F. This was in addition to the normal neutralisation raids and destruction of enemy facilities in Halmahera, Celebes and the Ceram-Ambon area, where there were upwards of 50,000 enemy troops, more or less isolated.

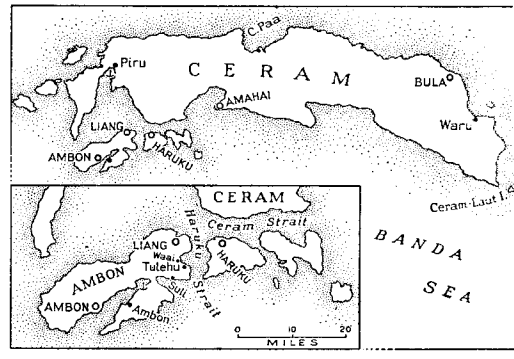
During this rather barren period, when few important targets could be found, First T.A.F. aircraft operated mostly in pairs or in threes and their operations took them daily over wide areas. The Beaufighters made many of their sorties south to the Ambon-Ceram area, as well as north to the Talaud and Sanghi Islands and westwards to Celebes. It is difficult to describe these operations or even a percentage of them without repeating similar details over again. Occasionally the routine nature of this work was high-lighted by an act of bravery or a particularly successful strike, but for the most part the action was stereotyped, and became monotonous to the crews.

On 22nd March the enemy air force sent two aircraft to raid Morotai. It was a rarity for the enemy to carry out bombing raids south of the Philippines at this stage. The two enemy planes approached Morotai from the south-east at a height of 18-20,000 feet and dropped seven bombs which landed at the north-east end of Pitu airfield, damaging a mess hut and wounding an American. Anti-aircraft guns opened fire on the raiders but without result. There were no night fighters in the air because of the adverse weather. On the same night, enemy raiders came over Biak Island and dropped bombs which killed thirty-four men and destroyed three aircraft. Allied Intelligence came to the conclusion that the attacking aircraft probably followed the earlier practice of staging in through Celebes and other forward bases, remaining at the staging points for only brief periods. Again North-Western Area aircraft were diverted to a series of harassing raids on enemy airfields in the Kendari-Ambesia area, while six aircraft of No. 77 Squadron were ordered from Noemfoor to Mokmer airfield in Biak to provide defence against further attacks.

Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron on armed reconnaissance over Ambon on the 26th March attacked and destroyed three twin-engined enemy aircraft at Liang. The Beaufighters, led by Provost, had begun by strafing Haruku where they encountered intense fire from the ground. They made only one run over this airfield. But at Liang they made twelve runs. In addition to attacking the three enemy aircraft which burst into flames and were destroyed, they hit two motor transports there. Two of the Beau-

fighters were damaged by the anti-aircraft fire but returned safely to their base.

At Noemfoor, Kittyhawks of No. 81 Wing continued their daily patrols round the island and after the enemy raid on Biak, carried out a number of sorties against targets on the Vogelkop peninsula, where, however, they found little activity. Of 84 of the wing's sorties over the Vogelkop peninsula only 36 found targets. During a sweep on the 29th March Pilot Officer McClintock[4] came down to 600 feet over Babo and his aircraft, being apparently hit by anti-aircraft fire, burst into flames. With some difficulty McClintock baled out, his parachute opening just above the tree tops. Landing uninjured on a small peninsula he quickly slipped out of his parachute harness and, using his compass to keep in a northerly direction, moved from the area through marshy ground. After thirty minutes walking he reached a creek and using his dinghy paddled to the sea and thence to a small island. Shortly afterwards he again put to sea where some hours later he was picked up by an air-sea rescue Catalina and was returned, little the worse for his experience, to his base at Kamiri.




On the 30th March Beaufighters attacked the Liang airfield again and the pilot of one (Warrant Officer Hart[5]) was wounded in both legs by anti-aircraft fire. The navigator, Flying Officer Wilson,[6] helped the wounded pilot to steady the aircraft while he applied emergency bandages to his legs and, in spite of pain from his wounds, Hart flew the Beaufighter across 350 miles of sea to make a perfect landing at Morotai.

Next day, off the same island, there was tense action when an attacking Beaufighter (Warrant Officer Roberts,[7] pilot, and Flight Sergeant Phillips,[8] navigator) was shot down. This aircraft and another (Flying Officers Sounness[9] and Cant[1]) set off from Morotai before 5 a.m. to sweep the

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[4] F-O R. G. McClintock, DFC, 412626; 76 Sqn. Student; of Lane Cove, NSW; b. Paddington, NSW, 4 Apr 1921

[5] W-O W. J. Hart, 415653; 22 Sqn. Orchardist; of Roleystone, WA; b. Victoria Park, WA, 31 Oct 1925.

[6] F-Lt D. B. Wilson, 431158; 22 Sqn. Engineer's pattern maker; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Brunswick, Vic, 28 Apr 1919.

[7] P-O R. K. Roberts, 428805. 22 and 31 Sqns. Clerk; of Armidale, NSW; b. Armidale, 7 Dec 1923.

[8] F-Sgt B. W. Phillips, 430969. 22 and 31 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Kaniva, Vic; b. Unley, SA, 24 Feb 1925.

[9] F-O K. W. Sounness, DFC, 427359; 31 Sqn. Farm hand; of Mt Barker, WA; b. Mt Barker, 22 Apr 1923.

[1] F-O G. R. Cant, 433178. 73 and 31 Sqns. Clerk; of Nyah West, Vic; b. Nyah West, 6 Jul 1922.

north coast of Ambon. The two machines were strafing anti-aircraft positions at Tulehu when Roberts' aircraft was hit. Both engines stopped and the pilot had to "ditch" in Haruku Strait. The Beaufighter sank in fifteen seconds and the men had barely enough time to scramble out and get into their dinghy.

Sounness decided to stay overhead to protect them until the arrival of a rescue Catalina for which he had signalled, or until other covering aircraft could be sent. This might mean he would have to ditch his aircraft because petrol supplies would last only until 10.30 a.m. A native craft came out to the stranded airmen and a lone native invited them to come ashore but they refused. Fortunately for Sounness two Beaufighters now arrived and he was able to leave the area, arriving at Morotai with only fifteen gallons of petrol left. So far no opposition had been met from the Japanese ashore, but it seemed certain they were leaving the dinghy as a decoy for bigger game.

Flight Lieutenant Mills[2] of No. 113 Air-Sea Rescue Flight arrived in a Catalina at 10.45 a.m. and found the two airmen 300 yards off shore from Waai village. As he approached, flying his aircraft just above the surface of the water, he was met by heavy fire from both sides of Haruku Strait. Back at base a tense crowd had gathered round the signal office listening to the drama. Roberts and Phillips, now swimming alongside their dinghy, came under fire from the Japanese in Waai village. As quickly as possible Mills put the Catalina down, lowering his wheels to keep the aircraft stationary; as he did so, the enemy opened up with machine-guns, rifles and even field pieces.

While returning this fire from the unprotected blister of the Catalina Flying Officer Hastie,[3] gunnery leader and fire control officer, was severely wounded in the stomach. He carried on until he was able to hand over the gun to Sergeant Ballinghall.[4] Sergeant Maberry, an American medical orderly in the Catalina, attended to Hastie's wounds while still under fire.

Meanwhile, the two covering Beaufighters concentrated their efforts in attacking the enemy on shore to distract their attention from the Catalina. In a low pass, Flying Officer Ellis'[5] aircraft was hit and one of his engines failed, but flying on one engine he continued his strafing runs until the survivors were picked up and the Catalina had taken off. The take-off was accomplished by Mills in spite of the rough water which caused structural damage to his aircraft.

The No. 113 Air-Sea Rescue Flight which Mills commanded had been formed at Cairns in January 1945. Air-sea rescue units were a great morale booster for aircrews in the Pacific theatre where long stretches of ocean had to be crossed. Rescue organisation had become so efficient that air-

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[2] F-Lt W. R. Mills, DFC, AFC, 412170. 20 Sqn and 113 ASR Flight. Veterinary student; of Paeroa, NZ; b. Thames, NZ, 29 Jan 1917.

[3] F-Lt N. W. Hastie, DFC, 402706. 11 and 20 Sqns, 113 ASR Flight. Clerk; of Vaucluse, NSW; b. Kew, Vic, 25 Jan 1921.

[4] Sgt R. C. Ballinghall, 41266; 113 ASR Flight. Textile mechanic; of East Brunswick, Vic; b. Brunswick, 26 Jul 1922.

[5] F-O T. W. Ellis, DFC, 420868; 31 Sqn. Civil servant; of Rabaul; b. Creswick, Vic, 5 Sep 1914.

crews in trouble preferred to "ditch" rather than "bale out" over enemy territory. So bad was the record of the Japanese in their treatment of Allied servicemen who fell into their hands that immediate escape and evasion was the one thought in the minds of airmen who were shot down or otherwise stranded in enemy areas. Escape procedures were constantly drilled into aircrews, so much so, that one pilot, who had not become conscious until an hour after his aircraft had hit a tree, found that he had carried out all the initial evasion procedures.

No. 113 Flight began its duties in February, when, on the 4th, a Catalina covered a strike by the R.A.A.F. at Tondano in Celebes. On 7th February, Mills, while reconnoitring Macassar Strait, was attacked by an enemy aircraft—a Rufe—which made several passes, firing cannon, but without scoring any hits. The varied duties of these aircraft during February, March and April included the delivering of medical supplies to Tawitawi Island in the Sulu Archipelago for guerillas; taking a party of Australian soldiers to Tahulandang Island and picking up natives for movement to Morotai; visiting Tarakan to pick up natives needed for questioning about conditions there, and covering many missions by R.A.A.F. squadrons.

North-Western Area's operational duties in January 1945 were similar to those of First Tactical Air Force. It provided an air garrison in the Northern Territory and bombing strikes against enemy shipping and installations in the Netherlands East Indies, including long-range missions to eastern Java. By January, another Australian heavy bomber squadron (No. 21, commanded by Squadron Leader I. O. Black[6]) had arrived in the area from Queensland, and was based at Fenton, in the Northern Territory. No. 23 Squadron, also armed with Liberators, was expected to arrive from the south in February, while No. 25 Squadron, based at Cunderdin, in Western Australia, was being rearmed with Liberators and would be available for reconnaissance or strikes in the Netherlands East Indies. To carry out operations in the N.E.I. it was planned that this squadron would stage through Truscott and Corunna Downs in the north-west.

No. 21 Squadron and No. 24 Squadron, which had been controlled by the American No. 380 Bombardment Group, now came under the control of the R.A.A.F's No. 82 (Heavy Bomber) Wing Headquarters, commanded by Group Captain Kingwell. The R.A.A.F. Wing was to take over the duties carried out by No. 380 Group, which was under orders to move to the Philippines, where it would join other formations of the Fifth Air Force. For nearly two years, firstly under Colonel Miller and then under Major Brissey, the No. 380 Group had provided the main offensive strength of North-Western Area and it had established a fine record of flying hours and accuracy for bombing. The group had operated under Australian control and except for minor friction, perhaps inevitable in the circumstances, the relations between Americans and Australians

[6] Sqn Ldr I. O. Black, 248, 13 and 6 Sqns; comd 21 Sqn 1944-46. Regular air force offr; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Camberwell, 12 Jun 1917.

were an excellent example of Allied cooperation. Two other Australian squadrons, Nos. 12 and 99, were being equipped with Liberators and it was intended that the R.A.A.F. would then form another heavy-bomber wing.

No. 82 Wing began to function on the 11th January, and on the 12th, a Liberator captained by Flight Lieutenant Court[7] of No. 24 Squadron scored the first victory for the wing when it strafed a 100-ton diesel-powered vessel and set it on fire from stem to stern. No. 24 Squadron had been operating in the Northern Territory since May 1944, but neither it nor any other squadron had lost a Liberator as a result of enemy action until 23rd January, when an aircraft captained by Pilot Officer Richards[8] and with a crew of nine others, was shot down by anti-aircraft fire over Cape Chater, Timor, while on its way to the Flores Sea to carry out an armed reconnaissance.

During January preparations were completed for an attack on power installations in east Java. Painstaking work went into this task and the basis was a preliminary technical survey made by the Central Intelligence Unit in Brisbane. The targets were pin-pointed and the distribution system of the power plants studied. Then Mosquito aircraft of No. 87 (Photographic Reconnaissance) Flight photographed the area, although results were not good because of the bad weather. From photographs, approach and target maps were then produced in Brisbane. Crews of No. 24 Squadron, who were to carry out the attack, went into two weeks concentrated training. Altogether, hundreds of R.A.A.F. personnel between Brisbane and North-Western Area worked on the plan.

On the day of the first attack, 27th January, however, only two of the six Liberators assigned got through to the power stations at Siman and at Mendalan on the Konto River in east Java. The two aircraft were captained by Kingwell and Flight Lieutenant Kirkwood[9] and staged through the operational base at Truscott in Western Australia. The two Liberators approached the Java coast at minimum altitude and after a dummy run over the target at Mendalan, Kingwell dropped six bombs which trailed through the transformer installation. The target was very well camouflaged and a dummy power house had been set up north of it. Kingwell's aircraft was not fired on either over the target or in any part of Java and no enemy aircraft were seen. Observation showed that the transformers had been destroyed. Kirkwood bombed and severely damaged the generators at Siman. Four other Liberators were unable to penetrate the cloud which had closed down to ground level and they were forced to jettison their bombs in the sea and abandon the mission. These aircraft took off much later than the first two and the weather had deteriorated. Kingwell and Kirkwood experienced excellent weather on the outward journey, but a

[7] Sqn Ldr W. Court, 2633; 24 Sqn. Regular airman; of Sydney; b. Gillingham, Kent, Eng, 25 Feb 1912.

[8] P-O K. H. Richards, 407253. 8 Sqn RAF; 24 Sqn. Clerk; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 24 Dec 1915. Killed in action 23 Jan 1945.

[9] F-Lt W. W. Kirkwood, 411497; 24 Sqn. Engineering student; of Parramatta, NSW; b. Port Kembla, NSW, 10 Apr 1919.

rude shock awaited them when they were returning. Conditions at the home base were bad and it was impossible to warn them because of the need to maintain radio silence. They ran into thunderheads and in one aircraft the navigator hit the roof with the first bump. Another member of the crew severely bruised his face and twice the aircraft was nearly turned over. Another aircraft flew for nearly two hours in the storm. The gyro instruments went "haywire" and the electrical activity in the storm made both the radio compass and the magnetic compass entirely useless.

On the 5th and 8th February No. 24 Squadron attacked these electrical installations again. Staging through Truscott, Wing Commander Bell[1] led a flight of four Liberators on the 5th February. The flight succeeded in cutting the penstock lines, causing spectacular water spouts, but apart from this there was little additional damage. Three days later another four Liberators, captained by Bell, Squadron Leader Nichols,[2] and Flight Lieutenants Ford[3] and Court attacked the targets for a third time. They came in at minimum altitude and this time completed the destruction of the power installations at both Mendalan and Siman. It seemed certain that the plants would not produce power for a considerable time. Over Java, Court's aircraft was attacked by two enemy Oscar fighters. One of them lowered its undercarriage so as to reduce speed to that of the Liberator and then dropped two phosphorus bombs which burst 500 feet above. Streamers of white smoke shot out from the explosion in all directions. The second Oscar then made three passes but scored no hits. Court's waist gunner claimed possible hits on it. The attack was broken off when Court turned south. He reached base safely.

The operations of No. 79 Wing, which were usually employed against enemy shipping within range, were seriously affected by the weather during January.

As a counter-propaganda measure Nos. 2 and 18 Squadrons carried out a series of widespread raids on villages in Timor on 1st January, a day on which the Japanese usually held festivities in Timor towns. Seven targets were successfully bombed and strafed.

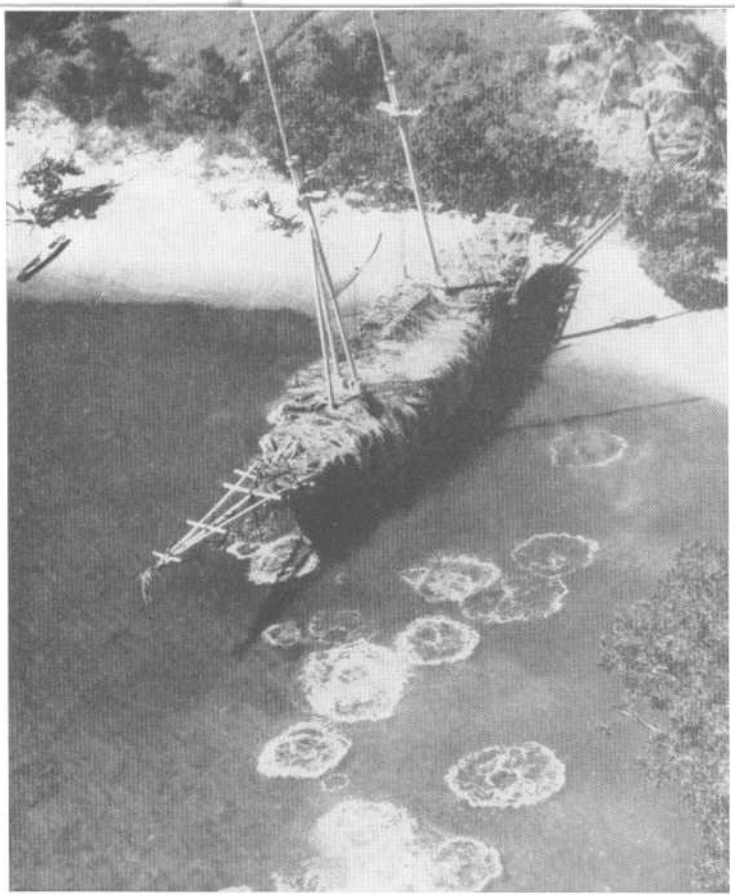
No. 1 Squadron had been ordered to move to Kingaroy, Queensland, where it was to be re-equipped with Mosquito aircraft and proceed north again as part of an attack wing in First Tactical Air Force. The squadron ceased operations on 9th January and moved rapidly to its new base at Kingaroy. This threw a larger burden on No. 13 Squadron which was now required to provide all convoy cover. This squadron lost two aircraft in January. One struck the ground while on an operational travel flight and all members of the crew were killed. The same day (27th January) another Ventura engaged on a training exercise at Gove crashed into the sea. There were three survivors from this crash but one of them died later.

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[1] W Cdr R. E. Bell, MVO, DFC, AFC, 268. 100 Sqn; comd 22 Sqn 1942, 24 Sqn 1945. Regular air force offr; of Darling Point, NSW; b. 10 Feb 1917.

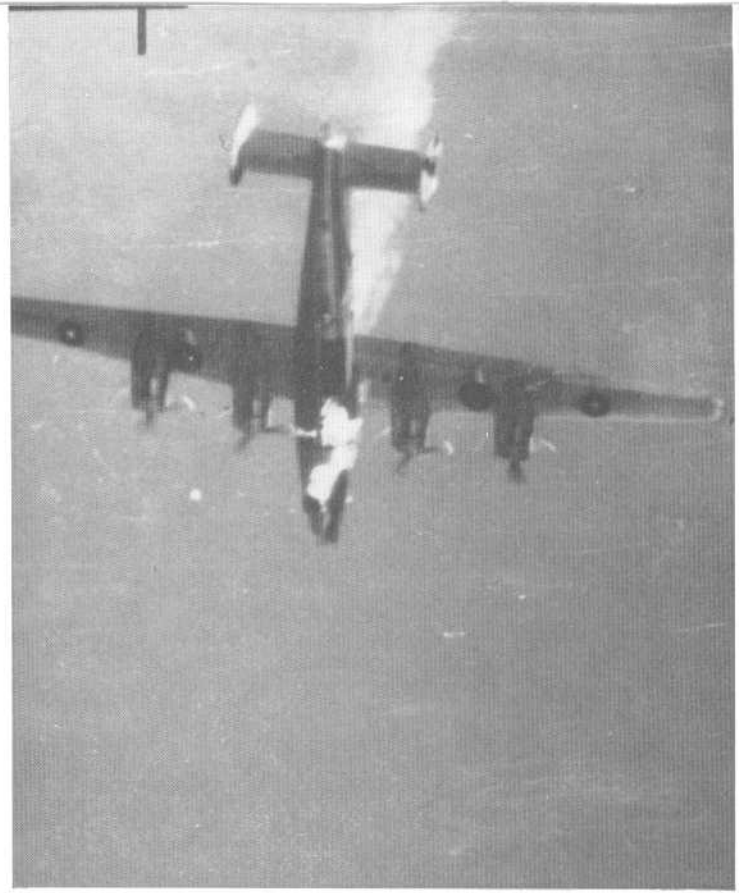
[2] Sqn Ldr A. W. Nichols, 483. 14, 460, 13 and 25 Sqns; comd ACH Pt Moresby 1945. Regular air force offr; of Wagin, WA; b. Wagin, 18 May 1917.

[3] F-Lt E. V. Ford, 255138; 24 Sqn. Motor engineer; of Northcote, Vic; b. London, 14 Feb 1911. Killed in action 6 Apr 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A lugger west of Tanjampea, in the Flores Sea, being bombed and strafed by a Liberator of No. 12 Squadron on 19th June 1945. The photograph taken from 200 feet shows the manner in which the Japanese camouflaged this type of small craft.



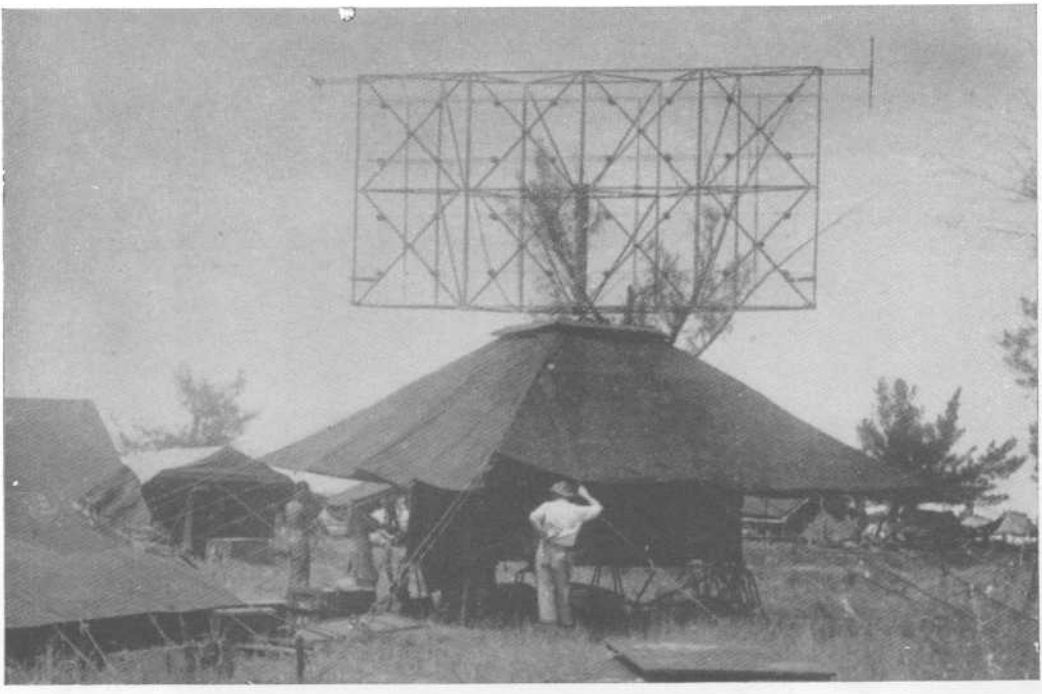
*(R.A.A.F.)*

A Liberator of No. 24 Squadron which was shot down while attacking the Japanese cruiser *Isuzu* near Sumba Island on 6th April 1945. Because of the necessity for precision bombing, the intense anti-aircraft fire, and the heavy fighter escorts, operations against enemy naval units were often carried out at a bitter price.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Fires caused by rocket-firing Beaufighters at Brunei, North Borneo, in June 1945. The photograph was taken by an R.A.A.F. Liberator another one of which can be seen in the foreground.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

A radar station at Labuan, Borneo, in mid-1945. This was one of the last radar stations to be erected by the R.A.A.F. and camouflage was not considered necessary.

In February there was a considerable increase in enemy shipping activity and No. 79 Wing alone destroyed or damaged for the month a total of thirty-eight vessels. Of these about half were the result of attacks by No. 13 Squadron operating around the coast of Sumbawa. Wing Commander Keenan,[4] the commander of the squadron, destroyed a "sugar dog"[5] by direct bomb hits. On the 21st February Flying Officer Ware[6] destroyed a 400-ton vessel off the east coast of Sumbawa.

The enemy was losing from 25 to 50 per cent of all shipping sighted by North-Western Area aircraft, but persisted in his movements. The week from 12th to 19th February produced a flood of ship sightings and it looked as though orders from higher authority were behind the enemy determination to press on with these movements. It appeared that they were trying to move food, fuel and supplies eastward from Flores and Sumbawa and also from Timor. Altogether during February the enemy in this area lost 29 ships and another 32 damaged.

The assumption made by Allied Intelligence that the enemy desired to withdraw troops from the area north of Australia was correct. The enemy in the Netherlands East Indies was in a weakened condition. Garrisons in the Ambon-Buru-Ceram-Kai-Aru Islands were out on the end of a limb where they could be of little strategic value to the Japanese. The heavy losses of shipping the enemy suffered in February did not deter him from intensifying his efforts to withdraw his forces from these by-passed islands. "In the early part of 1945," said Lieutenant-General Sakuma,[7] a staff officer of *Second Area Army* which had its headquarters in Celebes, "it was decided that it was unnecessary to have troops in the area north of Australia. The *Second Area Army* decided it was a waste of men and equipment to keep them in this area. The opinion was that the enemy might make a landing on Chinese soil before going on to Japan, so we planned to send these troops in the area north of Australia to where they were most needed in Malaya and Indo-China. The *Second Area Army* was de-activated."

The Japanese had big guns on the Aru and Tanimbar Islands where the *5th Division,* one of the best-equipped divisions in the Japanese Army, was deployed. Fifty heavy and light tanks had been brought to Timor to combat any attempted attack from Australia—an attack which never came except from the air. To get the tanks out of Timor, the enemy dismantled them and placed them on small vessels for movement to Indo-China, but only a few could be got away. The Japanese planned to withdraw about 21,000 men by the end of 1945. The units in the Aru-Kai-Tanimbar Islands were to be concentrated first in the Ceram area and at the first opportunity transferred to Java. However, the withdrawal

[4] W Cdr W. J. Keenan, DFC, 131. 1 Sqn; RAAF LO RAF Java 1941-42; comd 13 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Corowa, NSW; b. Corowa, 12 Oct 1913.

[5] A "sugar dog" was a code name used for consistency in reporting a small type of Japanese supply vessel (with one hatch) of 150 to 300 gross tons used between major ports and outlying bases. Larger vessels (with two hatches) and of 300 to 1,000 tons, were known as "sugar Charlies".

[6] F-Lt F. R. Ware, 427367; 13 Sqn. School teacher; of Subiaco, WA; b. Perth WA, 1 Nov 1919.

[7] Lt-Gen Sakuma (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ Tokyo).

could not be effected as planned because of the unrestricted activities of Allied aircraft and submarines.[8] Afraid of the Allied threat from Australia, the Japanese had held important army units just north of Australia until it was too late to get them back to where they could be of use in the defence of their homeland, now under direct threat.

In spite of heavy losses of shipping off northern Australia in February, the enemy persisted, in the following month, in attempts to extract his ground forces for redeployment in Malaya and China. Early in the month he changed his tactics, and provided greater anti-aircraft fire and fighter aircraft to cover convoys. In March, more than fifteen interceptions were made, but they failed to shoot down any Australian aircraft. However, on 22nd March, two fighters which attacked a Liberator, captained by Kingwell, severely damaged the bomber and wounded two crew members including Kingwell. The following day a Liberator captained by Squadron Leader Straus[9] took off from Truscott leading a formation of four aircraft on a shipping sweep. Shortly after take-off the Liberator crashed into the sea killing the crew.

Nos. 2 and 18 Squadrons were under orders to move from North-Western Area to Jacquinot Bay, where they were to support the Australian ground forces operating in New Britain. For this reason the activities of No. 79 Wing were on a reduced scale. Nevertheless, this wing managed during the month to destroy or damage a total of twenty vessels. The Venturas of No. 13 Squadron operating from Truscott were responsible for twelve of these vessels, all of which were attacked off the north coast of Sumbawa Island.

Liberators of No. 82 Wing flew a total of 1,706 operations hours and sank seven Japanese vessels during March. Most of the flying was on standard searches, but, in addition, six shipping sweeps were flown by flights of between two and seven aircraft over the Bali-Lombok-Sumbawa area.

On 13th March six Liberators of No. 25 Squadron joined with six from No. 82 Wing to carry out a strike against Mapin, a barge staging point on Sumbawa Island. This was No. 25 Squadron's first operation with Liberator aircraft, and the crews obtained a good bomb coverage of the target. The six aircraft staged through Truscott and all bombed the target.

When, on 22nd March, the Japanese, in order to divert attention from their shipping movements during their withdrawal, sent aircraft of the *7th Air Division* to bomb Morotai and Biak, they succeeded in their aim and North-Western Area heavy bombers were sent to carry out night harassing attacks on enemy airfields at Kendari and in the Vogelkop peninsula for the purpose of preventing the staging in of further raids on these bases. Air Commodore Charlesworth protested to R.A.A.F. Command, pointing out that it was useless to harass southern Celebes unless Ceram airfields were harassed simultaneously. "In previous raids on Moro-

[8] Japanese Monograph No. 24 (Historical Div, GHQ Tokyo).

[9] Sqn Ldr N. I. Straus, 250759. 7, 6, 32, 21 and 24 Sqns. Accountant; of East Malvern, Vic; b. Melbourne, 4 Nov 1912. Killed in aircraft accident 23 Mar 1945.

tai," he said, "it has been shown that raids were staged from both areas and that if only one area is harassed, such harassing is ineffective."[1]

The attacks on Japanese shipping were in full swing until the night raids on Morotai and Biak when they were discontinued temporarily. For the cost of two sorties the enemy bought for himself some immunity from attack for eight days. However, on 28th March, No. 25 Squadron sent out six Liberators which came up from Cunderdin to Corunna Downs and from there took off on a shipping sweep to Alas and Lombok Straits. They sank one vessel and damaged two others. Over Blongas Bay three of the Liberators (Squadron Leader Rosevear,[2] Flight Lieutenant Taylor[3] and Flying Officer Rivers[4]) were intercepted and attacked by an enemy fighter which dropped one phosphorus bomb over each aircraft without causing any damage. The Australian gunners fired on the enemy fighter but did not see any hits on the aircraft which then made off towards Den Pasar.

The Japanese *Southern Army* staff had set the end of April as the deadline for the preparations in French Indo-China[5] and in this month the clash between aircraft in Charlesworth's command and the Japanese attempting to withdraw from the islands north of Australia reached a climax.

On the evening of 4th April an Allied submarine operating in the Flores Sea reported a convoy consisting of a *Natori*-class cruiser and four smaller vessels steaming at 15 knots in a south-easterly direction. Later that night another submarine confirmed this report and early next morning the convoy was seen to be just south of Sape Strait. R.A.A.F. Intelligence anticipated that the convoy was making for Koepang, Timor, and Charlesworth decided to attack it with all available aircraft.

The cruiser was the 5,700-ton *Isuzu,* and the intention was to pick up troops and equipment at Timor. It was a direct challenge by the Japanese Navy to Allied aircraft in the Northern Territory. To give some protection to their convoy the *7th Air Division* was to provide fighter cover from island bases en route.

Unfortunately for the R.A.A.F. twelve Mitchells from No. 2 Squadron and seven from No. 18 Squadron were striking against the Tanimbar Islands on the 4th April and the time was too short to allow the convoy to be attacked by these squadrons on the inward course to Koepang. Therefore it was planned to strike the convoy early in the morning of the 6th April, when it was expected that it would be outward-bound from Koepang. The striking force was to consist of all available Liberators from No. 82 Wing and Mitchells from No. 79 Wing.

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[1] North-Western Area Tactical Appreciation, Feb-Mar 1945.

[2] Sqn Ldr W. H. Rosevear, 408025. 8 Sqn RAF, 454 Sqn, 203 Sqn RAF, 25 Sqn. Salesman; of Launceston, Tas; b. Launceston, 2 Jun 1921.

[3] Sqn Ldr G. A. Taylor, 2335. 6, 25 and 24 Sqns. Regular airman; of Kurrawong, WA; b. Kurrawong, 16 Sep 1913.

[4] F-Lt J. B. Rivers, 32001. 36 and 25 Sqns. Sales manager; of Sydney; b. Warwick, Qld. 18 Dec 1910.

[5] Japanese Monograph No. 65 (GHQ Historical Div, Tokyo).

On 5th April two Mosquitos of No. 87 Photographic Reconnaissance Flight took off from Coomalie with orders to check on the movements of the convoy. The two Mosquitos found the vessels and took photographs from 21,000 feet as they weaved about, heading in the general direction of Koepang. The Mosquitos then flew to Truscott and after refuelling there returned to Coomalie.

During the night three Catalinas of No. 43 Squadron were engaged in shadowing the convoy. It was thought probable that the convoy would leave Koepang under cover of darkness and this proved to be the case. At 1 a.m. Flight Lieutenant Ortlepp, who had located the convoy on his radar, signalled that it was steaming west at a speed of 18 knots. The Catalinas had to leave the area before dawn because it was considered highly probable that fighters would be escorting the convoy at first light.

In order to keep in contact another Mosquito was sent from Coomalie, but did not find the convoy until the Mitchells arrived on the scene for the attack. Anti-aircraft guns from one of the smaller vessels opened fire on the Mosquito and a few minutes later Flight Lieutenant Phillips[6] and Flying Officer Bradbury[7] saw two Japanese fighters at 19,000 feet (2,000 feet below them) climbing to intercept. Phillips increased the speed of his Mosquito to 400 miles an hour and the two Japanese fighters were left behind. (The Mosquito was unarmed, as it was used solely for photographic reconnaissance.)

Meanwhile, the bombing force, consisting of twenty Mitchells (ten from No. 2 Squadron and ten from No. 18 Squadron) and Liberators (four from No. 21 Squadron and five from No. 24 Squadron), had taken off with the intention of meeting off the south-east tip of Sumba and then, in company, bombing the convoy. However, the Liberator aircraft, owing to the difficulty of getting in formation in the early-morning darkness, arrived twenty minutes late at the rendezvous point. The Mitchells were expecting to attack at the limit of their range and could not wait. They therefore proceeded in close formation to attack the convoy. No. 18 Squadron's ten Mitchells attacked first from 10,000 feet. They dropped 500-lb bombs and claimed two direct hits and many near-misses. Japanese fighters attacked them but did no damage. Two minutes later No. 2 Squadron attacked, in three formations, concentrating on the *Isuzu*. The first formation of four aircraft led by Wing Commander Ingledew[8] attacked from 10,000 feet from the starboard quarter. The second formation of three led by Squadron Leader Hannah[9] followed, attacking on the port

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[6] F-Lt A. J. Phillips, DFC, 401172. 236, 227 Sqns RAF, and 87 Sqn. Clerk; of Nth Carlton, Vic; b. Reservoir, Vic, 11 Apr 1916.

[7] F-Lt D. C. J. Bradbury, 13176. 107 and 87 Sqns. Architectural draftsman; of Elwood, Vic; b. Melbourne, 21 Feb 1911.

[8] W Cdr T. S. Ingledew, 139. Comd 67 Sqn 1943-44, 1 Sqn 1944, 2 Sqn 1944-45. Regular air force offr; of Burwood, NSW; b. Sydney, 11 Aug 1915.

[9] Sqn Ldr D. H. Hannah, DFC, 404551. 55 Sqn RAF and 2 Sqn. Station overseer; of Tanby, Qld; b. Orange, NSW, 13 Jan 1913.

beam from 11,000 feet. The last formation of three led by Squadron Leader McMillan[1] attacked at 10,000 feet from the port quarter.

During the three attacks by No. 2 Squadron the vessels weaved violently and no bomb hits were seen. The nearest bombs fell about fifty yards away, with the majority of the other bombs undershooting. Two Japanese fighters attacked them almost head-on and although fire was exchanged there was no damage either to the enemy planes or to the Mitchells. Both Mitchell squadrons were fired on by the cruiser and other vessels, but, although the fire was accurate for height, it was trailing.

Twenty minutes later the nine Australian Liberators, led by Group Captain Parker, attacked from 12,000 feet. This time the anti-aircraft fire was extremely accurate and bursts were seen all round the third element (Squadron Leader White,[2] Flight Lieutenant McDonald[3] and Flight Lieutenant Court) during its first run over the target at 10 a.m. As it did so, enemy fighters attacked the formation, one closing to within twenty feet of Court's aircraft, in spite of which the Australian gunners did not appear to have scored any hits on it. Two fighters attacked McDonald's aircraft, closing to within 50 feet and breaking away underneath. Cannon shells burst under the flight deck of the Liberator, near the nose wheel. Fire broke out immediately and spread very quickly. McDonald then ordered the crew to bale out.

During the second run over the target, the enemy fighters attacked again and Flight Lieutenant Ford's aircraft was hit. A Japanese fighter also appeared to be hit. One of the Liberator's motors caught fire and flames were coming from the nose wheel compartment. Flames were licking around the feet of Warrant Officer Vickers,[4] the second pilot, when Ford gave the order to abandon the aircraft. The back hatch was jettisoned and five of the crew managed to jump as the aircraft was held on a level course by Ford. However, the Liberator then rolled over and, with Ford still at the controls, plunged into the sea, exploding on impact.

A few days after this action, Warrant Officer Shilling[5] wrote this account of events beginning just before McDonald gave the order to jump:

> The fire drove the engineer into the bomb bays. I did not see him again. The captain (McDonald) ordered the crew to bale out. The second pilot escaped through the bomb bays. I followed thirty seconds later. About two minutes later another member jumped. He did not appear to have a parachute. I went out of the bomb bays head first, counted six and pulled the release cord. It took me about twelve minutes to come down, during which time I counted six members parachuting from Flight Lieutenant Ford's Liberator. An additional member appeared to drop without a parachute. McDonald's aircraft disintegrated about 3,000 feet above the sea. It

[1] Sqn Ldr J. A. McMillan, 400726. 60 and 2 Sqns. Bank clerk; of Inverleigh, Vic; b. Geelong, Vic, 13 Nov 1916.

[2] Sqn Ldr G. J. White, 280541. 1, 6 and 21 Sqns. Radio engineer; of Broadview, SA; b. Adelaide, 25 Apr 1915.

[3] F-Lt S. L. McDonald, 411524. 7, 6, 2 and 24 Sqns. Agricultural inspector and instructor; of Leeton, NSW; b. Glenfield, NSW, 30 May 1916. Killed in action 6 Apr 1945.

[4] W-O C. G. Vickers, 401867; 24 Sqn. Railways employee; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Elmore, Vic, 24 Mar 1917.

[5] P-O K. R. Shilling, 406816. 2 and 24 Sqns. Draper; of West Midland, WA; b. Narrogin, WA, 18 Jul 1923.

did not explode. Ford's Liberator exploded on impact with the water. Enemy fighters did not attack parachutists. My legs were entangled in the shroud lines and I had to cut away the lines with a bowie knife. Although I had seen someone land about 50 yards away heavy seas prevented my seeing him. The seas were running at about four and a half feet. I never saw any member of my crew again. About fifteen to thirty minutes later the enemy cruiser came within 100-200 yards of me. She was heavily laden with troops. Equipment under tarpaulins was clearly visible on the decks. A machine-gun opened fire at the position I had been making for. I deflated my "Mae West" and sank. At this time the bullets hit the water within six feet of me. The cruiser then passed on. Some fifteen minutes later an escort vessel of about 1,000-2,000 tons passed within a hundred yards of me. This vessel was also laden with troops and equipment. It continued on for five minutes, turned and came directly towards me, passing close enough for the bow wave to throw me sideways. I could hear voices from the deck. No attempt was made to pick me up or shoot me. Some minutes later, a Zero passed overhead low and appeared to be looking for survivors. I deflated my "Mae West" again and sank to avoid detection. About ten minutes later seven Liberators circled low and after some five minutes dropped me a dinghy which landed fifty yards away. Twenty minutes later a Catalina (of No. 112 Air-Sea Rescue Flight, captained by Flight Lieutenant Bulman[6]) arrived and taxied close enough to pick me up. Sergeant Sayer[7] from Flight Lieutenant Ford's crew was aboard, having been picked up earlier. I was exhausted and cold. I had swallowed a lot of salt water. We taxied around and picked up Warrant Officer Vickers, also from Flight Lieutenant Ford's crew. The Catalina took off, landing again about thirty minutes later to pick up another survivor, whom I believe to be Flight Sergeant Faichnie.[8] He was completely exhausted and was being pulled in over the gun blisters when the Catalina was attacked by a Zero from 12 o'clock. The Catalina caught fire immediately and sank three minutes later. I had undressed, as ordered, and was going to bed in a bunk in the waist. I had been called forward for the landing and was in the navigator's position when the attack was made. The order was given to bale out and I made my way aft. On the way a fuel line burst above me, pouring blazing fuel on to my back. This was extinguished by Sergeant Sayer who smothered the flames with a sleeping bag. I escaped out of the port blister, naked and with no Mae West. I do not remember much for a few minutes and when I regained my faculties I was being kept afloat by two members of the Catalina crew, Flight Lieutenant Bulman and Flight Sergeant Scholes.[9] These two men had to let me go after fifteen minutes owing to their Mae Wests coming undone. Flying Officer Becke[1] helped me for the next forty-five minutes. Through the fortitude of these men I was saved from drowning. A few minutes after the Catalina was hit, the air-sea rescue Liberator (Flight Lieutenant Byfield[2]) dropped two large dinghies and one supply canister. After an hour's struggling we reached one of the dinghies. Another Catalina (Flight Lieutenant Corrie) was directed to us by the Liberator. It landed after half an hour's battle with heavy seas and wind. We were eventually picked up. One dinghy was cut in half by the port wing float. As the last survivor clambered aboard (nine men were rescued, six from Bulman's Catalina and three from the Liberators) an Irving was sighted making for us. The enemy made his first attack as we were taking

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[6] F-Lt C. R. Bulman, DFC, 416145. 9, 20 and 11 Sqns, 112 ASR Flight. Accountant; of Westbourne Park, SA; b. St Peters, SA, 28 Apr 1915.

[7] F-Sgt W. W. T. Sayer, 30337. 453 Sqn, 1 Commn Flight, and 24 Sqn. Plumber; of Burnie, Tas; b. Launceston, Tas, 26 Feb 1913.

[8] F-Sgt I. Faichnie, 431408; 24 Sqn. Clerk; of Ivanhoe, Vic; b. Bendigo, Vic, 19 Jun 1925. Killed in action 6 Apr 1945.

[9] W-O A. J. Scholes, DFM, 19191. 20 Sqn and 112 ASR Flight. Motor mechanic; of Bendigo, Vic; b. Maryborough, Vic, 3 Jun 1915.

[1] F-Lt R. E. Becke, 425585. 11 Sqn, 112 ASR Flight, 20 Sqn. Cane farmer; of Home Hill, Qld; b. Ayr, Qld, 19 May 1922.

[2] F-Lt N. H. Byfield, 406173. 1 Commn Flight, 2 AAU, and 24 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Maylands, WA; b. Northam, WA, 12 Dec 1920.

off and scored hits. Our return fire did no visible damage. A running fight ensued for about twenty minutes. The attacks ceased and we headed for Darwin, reaching there about 2230 hours. . . .

After the Australian attack, the *Isuzu* had suffered some damage, including direct hits from bombs dropped, but the speed of the convoy had not been reduced and it continued on its way. However, that night one of the smaller vessels was sunk by a submarine, and next day the *Isuzu* suffered the same fate.

After this action there was some criticism of the standard of gunnery shown by the Liberator crews and steps were taken to improve the standard. One of the difficulties was the lack of fighter aircraft that could be employed for bomber-versus-fighter exercises. However, Spitfires were made available for these exercises, even at the risk of leaving the area unable to intercept air attacks on Darwin.

CHAPTER 25

# VICTORY IN BURMA

THE attempt by the Japanese Army to invade India had been defeated by June 1944, in spite of the extraordinary vigour and determination the Japanese had put into this last desperate throw. The Fourteenth Army had relieved its garrisons at Imphal and Kohima and now the defeated enemy, harried from the air and cut off from supplies, was retreating from his forward positions. The Japanese had gambled on a quick victory to give them food, ammunition and equipment from captured British dumps. But they had failed. They paid the penalty of their logistical imprudence now when they had little left to sustain them in the march back through the jungle to the plain of Burma.

The monsoon of 1944 came, bringing 500 inches of rain in Assam and 175 inches to northern Burma. The onset of the monsoon, by interfering with Allied communications, might have been expected to aid the retreating Japanese, for, in the past, the wet season had been a grave handicap to offensive operations in the Burma theatre. But this time the Fourteenth Army would not allow it to hold up their pursuit. They aimed to act at once against the stricken enemy divisions, to destroy them while the opportunity was there, so that they could begin the reconquest of Burma.

The over-all policy for Burma in this period had been communicated to Admiral Mountbatten by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 3rd June 1944. In addition to developing the link with China, he was "so far as is consistent with the above, to press advantages against the enemy, by exerting maximum effort, ground and air, particularly during the current monsoon season, and in pressing such advantages to be prepared to exploit the development of overland communications to China".

Third Tactical Air Force sent aircraft to destroy bridges ahead of the retiring enemy soldiers and the Hurricanes struck at them at milestone after milestone along the road to Tiddim. Chindits returning to Imphal from their operations behind the lines encountered escaping Japanese on the way between Fort Keary and Ukhrul. They left Fort Keary on 28th June and took many prisoners. On either side of the escape track lay dead and dying Japanese—men who could not make the steep 7,000-foot grade to get back into Burma because of their starved condition. Scattered about were guns, mule saddles and harness and the stripped bones of mules. These animals had weeks previously been slaughtered for food.

In the north, Stilwell's "Galahad" force (a mixed force of American, Chinese and Kachin troops) had captured the airfield at Myitkyina by 17th May, and within a month an entire Chinese division had been flown in to this airfield for the capture of Myitkyina itself. Myitkyina, however, held out against all assaults for another eleven weeks.

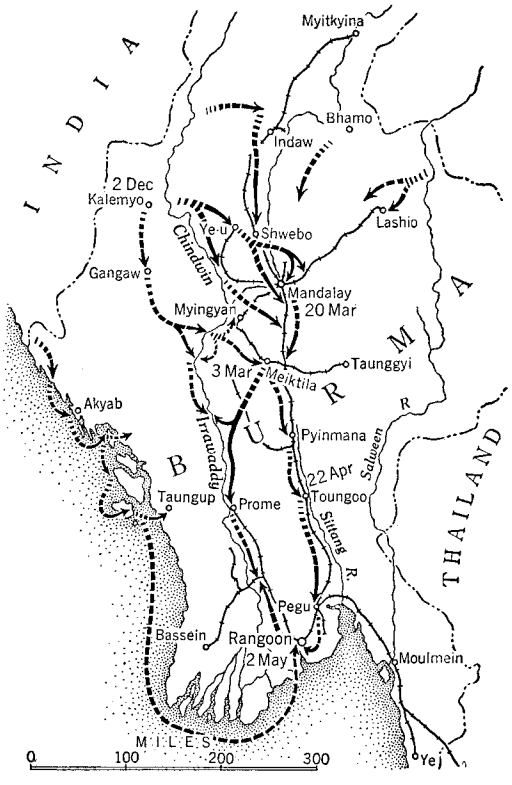
Meanwhile the 77th Brigade of the Long Range Penetration Group had moved up from the south to attack Mogaung. Its commander, Brigadier

Calvert, had set up his headquarters at Pinhmi and waited for the 111th and 14th Brigades. However, he received advice that these brigades would be unable to reach Mogaung for some time because of the rain and a set-back to the 111th Brigade at "Blackpool". Calvert then decided that he would attack Mogaung with the forces he had at his disposal.[1] On 3rd June, the Japanese had dug themselves in strongly at Mogaung. To have sent the ground forces into battle against the Japanese when they were so firmly entrenched would have been suicidal, so maximum air support was called for.

Flight Lieutenant George and Flight Lieutenant Young of the R.A.A.F. established themselves on successive observation points on the hill beyond Mogaung, equipped with wireless sets. Flight Lieutenant Roberts acted as forward observation officer. He remained with Calvert and had a direct telephone to Young, who passed on all messages to George, the latter being in radio contact with support aircraft. At times Roberts was 100 yards ahead of the front-line Chindits and within 100 yards of the bombing targets.

As many as sixty Mustang aircraft were used at Mogaung in one day, and between 3rd and 26th June, more than 500 close-support sorties were flown. The Mustangs dropped 500-lb bombs and strafed the enemy whose resistance they overcame. Mogaung was then captured with the assistance of the 38th Chinese Division.

With the capture of Mogaung, and of Myitkyina in August, the converging British, American and Chinese troops had linked up and the whole north Burma front took more definite shape. In August, General Slim relieved the Long Range Penetration Group which was flown back to India for a rest. It was replaced




[1] For a detailed account of this and other actions of 77 Bde, see M. Calvert, *Prisoners of Hope*, 1952. (Brig J. M. Calvert, DSO. Organised commando training centre, Wilson's Promontory, Vic, 1940-41; comd School of Bush Warfare, Burma, 1941-42, 77th Bde 1943; Special Air Service Bde 1944. Regular soldier; b. 6 Mar 1913.)

by the 36th British Division, which began to fight its way southwards along the "railway corridor".

After the relief of Imphal, General Slim's IV and XXXIII Corps, supported by No. 221 Group, pursued the *XV Japanese Army* in two main thrusts which were to join up eventually at Kalemyo—IV Corps down the Tiddim road and XXXIII Corps down the Kabaw Valley. These thrusts would lead to the crossing of the Chindwin River so that the enemy could be brought to battle on the Shwebo-Mandalay plain where Allied tanks and infantry could be used.

On 4th August XXXIII Corps had entered Tamu to find the enemy had left behind wounded, sick and dying, and unburied corpses lay among abandoned guns, tanks and vehicles. In its drive down the Kabaw Valley, the corps was entirely supplied by air, while two fighter squadrons gave close support. In addition, aircraft aided the advance by attacking enemy vehicles in the valley and striking at the aircraft which supplied him in the Chindwin with Spitfire, Hurricane, Beaufighter, Mitchell and Wellington aircraft. On 4th September the corps occupied Sittaung on the Chindwin. Like Tamu, it was littered with corpses and much abandoned equipment. Meanwhile, again supplied by air, IV Corps had been advancing towards Tiddim, which fell to the 5th Indian Division on 18th October.

There were few all-weather airfields available in the forward areas so that it was necessary to withdraw seventeen squadrons during the monsoon. These squadrons were re-equipped and retrained. Nine of them were Hurricane squadrons which were converted to Thunderbolt aircraft. Four of the Vengeance squadrons converted to Mosquitos and two Wellington squadrons to Liberators. Those squadrons which remained in the line succeeded in penetrating the weather every day except one during the monsoon.

The air offensive was not sustained without severe losses, although this was due much more to the bad weather than to enemy action. The most appalling hazard for the aircrews was the layer of cloud which sometimes blanketed the target, so that the slightest navigational error would send the aircraft crashing into the side of a mountain. An entry in a transport squadron's summary of effort during the monsoon of 1944 indicates the problems faced: "It has taken on occasion six or seven days of battling through torrential rain, strong winds and ten-tenths cloud down to 200 feet to achieve one mission, but it has been done."

Of sixteen Spitfires of No. 615 Squadron which entered a cumulonimbus cloud of the type which soars from the ground to 30,000 feet, only eight survived. On 10th August, these sixteen aircraft took off from Palel on a travel flight to the new squadron base at Baigachi, 28 miles from Calcutta. Led by Squadron Leader McCormack the Spitfires encountered the most violent type of monsoon storm, in which it became impossible to keep the aircraft under control. One aircraft was lifted suddenly through 6,000 feet while another was thrown, out of control, almost

to the ground. One of the survivors, Warrant Officer Layfield,[2] related this account of the incident:

> There suddenly appeared a huge black wall of cloud, too wide to fly around. Wondering how the C.O. intended to overcome this obstacle, we suddenly realised we were climbing madly, almost hanging on our propellers. We then commenced flying through some fluffy cumulus, which was only a little bumpy and some light rain. The C.O. called out over the R/T to close in, which we did, and henceforth had our time cut out flying as close as possible to the Spitfire in front. The C.O. was now flying on instruments and the rest of the squadron packed in as close as possible, like chickens around the mother hen. Suddenly it became brighter . . . then we were in it again and this time it was ten times as thick, ten times as bumpy, and if the preceding plane was merely a blur before, now it was only visible at times. We switched on our navigation lights, but even this didn't help. It began to get shaky, trying to keep close to a plane with such thick rain on the windscreen, distorting any vision there might have been . . . we seemed to be in the very core of the storm when suddenly my kite slithered to the right uncontrollably, then to the left, then I don't know where, for I was suddenly on my own.

Of the eight aircraft which were lost, four pilots were killed, of whom three were Australians. One other pilot made a successful crash-landing and three pilots took to their parachutes.

Of Australian aircrew engaged on operations through July to October 1944, most were sent on strategic, rather than tactical, missions, and these strategic missions were flown predominantly in Liberator aircraft of Nos. 159, 355 and 356 Squadrons. No. 159 Squadron carried out daylight cloud-cover attacks on the railway line between Mandalay and Indaw during July and in August it was called on to carry out mining operations with bombing diversions on Moulmein, Mergui and Port Blair. In the operation to mine Mergui on 13th August, twelve aircraft were sent. The weather was clear over the target during the mining, but the planes experienced accurate anti-aircraft fire, and Flight Lieutenant Robertson's[3] plane was damaged, forcing him to land at an advanced airfield.

Missions by No. 159 Squadron in October included a railway strike in Siam and a minelaying mission to Penang. In the Siam strike the crews were instructed to attack locomotives as a primary target, and opportunity targets along the line as secondary targets. One of the aircraft, in which Flying Officer Hocking[4] was mid-upper gunner, was not heard of again, but Hocking was recovered later as a prisoner of war. Other aircraft were intercepted by enemy fighters. One, piloted by Pilot Officer Anderson,[5] fought an enemy fighter for five minutes before escaping into cloud. Another with Warrant Officer Ford[6] and Flying Officer Nelson[7] in its

[2] F-O R. S. M. Layfield, 414244. 615 Sqn RAF. Refrigeration engineer; of Brisbane; b. Herston, Qld, 6 May 1921.

[3] Sqn Ldr R. A. Robertson, 77251 RAF. 159 Sqn RAF. Of Albany, WA; b. Albury, NSW, 15 Feb 1913.

[4] F-Lt R. T. Hocking, DFC, 407291. 11 and 159 Sqns RAF. Salesman; of Malvern, Vic; b. Kadina, SA, 24 Sep 1916.

[5] F-Lt W. R. Anderson, 427492. 159 and 357 Sqns RAF; attchd US Intell Force 1945. Bank clerk; of North Perth, WA; b. Perth, 14 Dec 1923.

[6] W-O E. P. Ford, 420172; 159 Sqn RAF. Insurance agent; of Charity Creek via Wingham, NSW; b. Wingham, 26 Jun 1916. Killed in action 5 Oct 1944.

[7] F-O J. A. Nelson, 423854. 159 Sqn RAF. Carpenter; of Manly, NSW; b. Pyrmont, NSW, 21 Feb 1914. Killed in action 5 Oct 1944.

crew was attacked and failed to return to base. An S.O.S. signal was received from the aircraft, reporting that it was under attack by an enemy aircraft over the target and that two of its engines had stopped. A little later it reported that Ford was dead and three others wounded. Five minutes later a final signal was received that the aircraft was trying to reach Chittagong. Searches made later for the aircraft proved fruitless.

Nos. 355 and 356 Squadrons were also detailed to attack the railway line between Bangkok and Chiengmai on this day. They attacked in the afternoon and one aircraft of No. 355 Squadron, with three Australians in its crew, was shot down over the target. The Liberator was engaged by an enemy fighter, and crashed into a wood and exploded three miles from the target.

On the night of 27th-28th October, No. 159 Squadron (including four Australian captains) laid sixty mines in the inner approaches to Penang, an operation which involved a round trip of more than 3,000 miles.

Between July and October 1944 a few of the Australian pilots in No. 34 (Hurricane) Squadron and No. 261 (Thunderbolt) Squadron were frequently in action against tactical targets. For the month of August 1944, No. 34, which was based well forward at Palel, flew 55 sorties, mostly in support of XXXIII Corps, which was on its way down the road to Tiddim.

No. 261 Squadron flew its last sorties with Hurricane aircraft on 16th June 1944. After conversion to Thunderbolts, it was back in action from Kumbhirgram, and on 16th September flew its first bombing sortie against the Japanese at Mawlaik. A few days later Flight Lieutenant Gibson[8] and Pilot Officer Cleary[9] went on a mission to Indaw where they made a successful strike on oil storage dumps. When they left the target red flames and a column of black smoke, rising hundreds of feet, indicated successful bombing. On 1st October the squadron flew twenty-two sorties in support of the army, Gibson and Cleary again taking part. They bombed and strafed targets in the Pinlebu area.

In November, with the end of the 1944 monsoon, Allied air operations grew more intense. Sorties flown by Third Tactical Air Force, which in September 1944 had totalled 4,351, grew to 7,847 for the month of November. The Australians on Nos. 79, 146 and 261 (Thunderbolt) Squadrons flew a small proportion of these sorties, while others, flying Mosquitos in No. 45 Squadron, flew on two occasions during the month.

On 1st November Flying Officer Cartledge,[1] with Flying Officer Williams[2] as navigator, flew a lone Mosquito on a moonlight "rhubarb" against the Meiktila airfield where he dropped 500-lb bombs in dispersal bays from a height of 200 feet. The Mosquito was hit and damaged by

[8] F-Lt A. H. Gibson, 403580. 261 Sqn RAF. Insurance clerk; of Dulwich Hill, NSW; b. Dubbo, NSW, 20 Jan 1917.

[9] F-Lt T. E. Cleary, 412904. 165 and 261 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Enfield, NSW; b. Bathurst, NSW, 10 Sep 1922.

[1] F-Lt J. O. Cartledge, 407663. 11 and 45 Sqns RAF. Engineering student; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 23 Jun 1919.

[2] F-O G. F. Williams, DFC, 404153. 228, 203 and 45 Sqns RAF. Salesman; of Nundah, Qld; b. Brisbane, 20 Nov 1919.

anti-aircraft fire, but reached base safely. On 3rd November three Australian Thunderbolt pilots of No. 146 Squadron set off with eleven other Thunderbolts to strafe dispersal pens and installations at Heho airfield. They claimed the destruction of one enemy aircraft and on the way back to base destroyed a lorry containing 30 troops, set fire to three trucks at Myingyan and strafed boats on the Chindwin River. No. 261 Squadron sent twelve aircraft on another attack against Heho on the same day.

On 9th November Mosquitos of No. 45 Squadron took part in another attack on Meiktila airfield. They encountered enemy fighters as well as anti-aircraft fire, and Flying Officer Ewing[3] was wounded, while a New Zealand pilot was shot down by an Oscar fighter, badly injured, and taken prisoner.

Four Australians—Flight Lieutenants Shave,[4] Titterington,[5] Powell,[6] and Carlton[7]—were killed on 1st November when their Liberator failed to return from a special operation to the border of Burma and Yunnan Province. The squadron (No. 357) was engaged in the introduction and supply in enemy-occupied territory of liaison officers employed in raising and assisting guerilla forces.

Nos. 159, 215 and 356 Liberator Squadrons sent aircraft to attack strategic targets on the night of 2nd-3rd November. Nos. 159, 355 and 356 attacked railway targets in Siam. Fifteen aircraft of No. 159, three captained by Australians, carried out a most successful attack at low level on the railway workshops at Bangkok. The majority of the buildings were burning and the roofs of several had collapsed before the aircraft had left the area. No. 355 Squadron, which followed, found the target well alight when they arrived. They bombed it again, causing "showers of fireworks" to shoot into the air.

Again on the night of 4th-5th November these three Liberator squadrons carried out strikes against railway targets at Rangoon. Escorted by fighters, they made a formation attack on the railway workshops. After bombing through anti-aircraft fire, the formation and its fighter escort were attacked by Oscars and Hamps. One enemy fighter was destroyed by a No. 215 Squadron aircraft in which Warrant Officer Stephens[8] and Sergeant Fleming[9] were crew members. Liberators of Nos. 355 and 356 Squadrons went out in daylight on 19th November, escorted by twenty-four Thunderbolts, to attack another Rangoon railyard and sidings. No. 356 scored direct hits on the tracks and buildings and crews saw

[3] F-Lt P. N. Ewing, DFC, 406523. 11, 31 and 45 Sqns RAF. Bank clerk; of North Perth, WA; b. London, Eng, 23 Oct 1920.

[4] F-Lt O. S. Shave, DFC, 408527. 1576 Flight RAF, 357 Sqn RAF. Accountant and auditor; of Moonee Ponds, Vic; b. Melbourne, 15 Aug 1916. Killed in action 1 Nov 1944.

[5] F-Lt S. D. Titterington, DFC, 411553. 1576 Flight RAF, 357 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Haberfield, NSW; b. Manchester, Eng, 26 Jan 1922. Killed in action 1 Nov 1944.

[6] F-Lt R. C. J. Powell, 412179. 357 Sqn RAF. Salesman; of Rose Bay, NSW; b. Katoomba, NSW, 28 Jul 1917. Killed in action 1 Nov 1944.

[7] F-Lt A. G. Carlton, 412390. 42 and 357 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Manly, NSW; b. Manly, 13 Aug 1919. Killed in action 1 Nov 1944.

[8] F-O A. R. M. Stephens, 406494. 34, 355, 159 and 215 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Leederville, WA; b. Wagin, WA, 22 Mar 1916.

[9] W-O F. E. Fleming, 428435. 215 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Middle Park, Vic; b. Essendon, Vic, 12 Aug 1924.

two Oscars which appeared unwilling to attack and were chased off by the fighter escort. On 22nd November these two squadrons attacked again at Khao Hagaung in Siam, where they bombed harbour facilities and coastal vessels. The trip involved a round flight of 2,500 miles. No. 355 Squadron's bombs were seen to burst around two small jetties and a collection of barges, while direct hits were scored on small coastal vessels. One small motor vessel was claimed as sunk. Another, about 1,500 tons, was hit by an oil bomb forward of the bridge and left blazing.

On 28th November, a Sunderland flying-boat of No. 230 Squadron, captained by Squadron Leader Ingham[1] and carrying Flying Officer Cary[2] in its crew, failed to return to base from an anti-submarine patrol and its crew was posted missing.

On the last night of November fifteen aircraft of No. 159 Squadron sortied to Bangkok, where they bombed the north railway station, scoring hits and starting fires. This squadron sent fifteen aircraft (three of which were captained by Australians) to Bangkok on 2nd December, putting out of action an important railway viaduct. No. 159, in addition to bombing sorties, carried out minelaying operations during December.

Meanwhile, Liberators of No. 215 Squadron were attacking the Burma-Siam railway. On 8th December nine aircraft from this squadron carried out daylight low-level attacks claiming the destruction of one locomotive and setting part of a train on fire. The crews experienced intermittent anti-aircraft fire during their attacks and guns were silenced by return fire from a Liberator captained by Flight Lieutenant Coulin.[3] The squadron attacked again at Kanchanaburi two days later and demolished a stores building with a direct hit. Australians were in five of the nine Liberators taking part.

On the night of 14th December sixteen Liberators, three captained by Australians, of No. 159 also attacked Kanchanaburi. Several aircraft were intercepted and attacked by enemy fighters. Five combats took place and one of the fighters was damaged. The Liberators went on to attack their target on which 28 tons of bombs were dropped.

Thirty-two Australians were in the crews of Liberators from Nos. 159, 355 and 356 Squadrons which carried out missions on 21st December. No. 159 bombed the jetties and railway sidings at Martaban; Nos. 355 and 356 sent a total of twenty-four Liberators to attack enemy stores dumps at Taungup. No. 356 bombed in four groups of three aircraft in line abreast covering the target area with a good pattern. No. 355 also observed a concentration of bomb bursts across the target area.

Nos. 79, 146 and 261 Squadrons, flying Thunderbolts, were active during December. From No. 79 Squadron, Squadron Leader May[4] led a

[1] Sqn Ldr K. V. Ingham, DFC, 406456. 230 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Geraldton, WA; b. Albany, WA, 6 Mar 1918. Posted missing and presumed killed 28 Nov 1944.

[2] F-O S. L. Cary, 412393; 230 Sqn RAF. Traveller (motor parts); of Bellevue Hill, NSW; b. Leichhardt, NSW, 31 Oct 1909. Posted missing and presumed killed 28 Nov 1944.

[3] F-Lt E. F. Coulin, 412910. 215 and 117 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Carrington, NSW; b. Wickham, NSW, 9 Nov 1922.

[4] Sqn Ldr R. D. May, DSO, 402204. 66, 79 and 258 Sqns RAF; comd 79 Sqn 1944-45. Station overseer; of Condobolin, NSW; b. Condobolin, 16 Apr 1918.

number of missions. On 11th December, May led the squadron, including three other Australians, in a strafing attack on Meiktila and Thedaw airfields. They scored hits on hangarettes and machine-gun posts, while four of the attacking planes were hit in return. May's aircraft was damaged in the airscrew, engine and hydraulic system but he made base and landed safely. The previous day twelve Thunderbolts of No. 146 Squadron had also attacked Meiktila airfield, three Australians taking part.

On 21st December two Australians took part with ten other Thunderbolt pilots of No. 261 Squadron in supporting ground troops a mile east of Gangaw. Flying Officer Cambridge[5] was killed on this mission when his aircraft was hit by ground fire, crashed into the ground and burst into flames.

Two of the outstanding Australian pilots in the Burma-India theatre were, in 1944, commanders of Mosquito squadrons. One of them, Wing Commander Stumm, who commanded No. 45 Squadron, had been killed on 13th May 1944, during the conversion of his squadron from Vengeance to Mosquito aircraft. His companion, Flight Lieutenant McKerracher,[6] was also killed. The other, Wing Commander Hudson,[7] commander of No. 82 Squadron, crashed behind the enemy lines on 19th December 1944 and, with his navigator, was taken prisoner by the Japanese.

On 19th December, with Flight Lieutenant McKenzie[8] as his wing man, Hudson set out on a "rhubarb" of the Monywa-Pagan-Mandalay area. The two Mosquitos shot up some sampans and on the return journey, while approaching to attack some river craft on the Irrawaddy near Mandalay, Hudson's aircraft hit the river surface, and although it became airborne again it was unflyable and he made a forced landing on some rough broken country near the junction of the Chindwin and Irrawaddy Rivers. Both Hudson and his navigator, Pilot Officer Shortis,[9] R.A.F., suffered only lacerations to the legs and slight concussion. They were captured by Japanese and Indian National Army soldiers and taken to Myingyan, and received rough treatment from the Japanese. Hudson reported after his release:

> At one stage we were thrown on the road with our hands tied behind our backs and remained on the road for three or four hours while scores of Japanese soldiers took their turn in kicking us, aiming blows at more painful parts, smacking us with flats of swords and bashing us with bamboo sticks. At the finish I was

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[5] F-O T. H. Cambridge, 410213. 261 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Bendigo, Vic; b. Bendigo, 2 Jul 1922. Killed in action 21 Dec 1944.

[6] F-Lt W. J. McKerracher, DFM, 406099. 113 and 45 Sqns RAF. Clerk; of Cottesloe, WA; b. Mitcham, Surrey, Eng, 5 Nov 1909. Killed in aircraft accident 13 May 1944.

[7] W Cdr L. V. Hudson, 400448. 11 Sqn RAF; comd 82 Sqn RAF 1944. Journalist; of Sydney; b. Manly, NSW, 27 Feb 1916. (Hudson had arrived in India early in 1942 as a sergeant pilot in No. 11 Squadron, which had been transferred from the Middle East. He served on this squadron until June 1943 and the following year, having been promoted to wing commander, he became the first Empire Air Training Scheme graduate to command a Mosquito squadron in India.)

[8] F-Lt A. G. McKenzie, DFC, 415437. 82 Sqn RAF. Steel drill sharpener; of Norseman, WA; b. Collie, WA, 1 Feb 1916.

[9] F-O J. A. Shortis, 185119 RAF. 27 and 82 Sqns. Of Dagenham, Essex, Eng; b. London, 24 Sep 1921.

in a state where I could not feel the punches, being numb with pain. After this ordeal, a Japanese medical officer treated very scantily our lacerations which had turned septic, then he tied our hands behind our backs, sat us down, and punched us until we were unconscious. . . . When we arrived at Myingyan, we were taken to Military Police Headquarters—a small bungalow—and interrogations began immediately. We were given a small cup of sweet milk first and then interrogated. As no attempt had been made to separate us, Shortis and I had agreed upon a "cock and bull" story to satisfy the Japs, but I had decided that it would ring truer if we held out as long as possible before telling it. Consequently we adhered to the policy of telling only our number, rank and name, except for a few irrelevant subjects. We were interrogated separately for periods of three and four hours at a stretch, and our insistence on refusing to answer questions resulted in constant face slapping and threats that we would "surely be put to death".

We were both quite sure in our minds that the Japanese killed all their prisoners and considering we could not walk more than a couple of yards because of our leg injuries, we could see no chance of escape. Towards the end of the day the interrogators appeared to become disgusted and had us taken to the town cell by bullock cart. It was during the journey that I first saw a chance of survival. The boy, who had been acting as interpreter, and who accompanied us to the gaol, assured us that he was on the British side and we had nothing to worry about being killed, as the Japs never carried out their threats to airmen, and that we would be taken to Rangoon, where there was a prisoner of war camp.

The Japanese had threatened that we would not be fed until we talked, but soon after it became dark, some members of the Burmese Police Force arrived with food—boiled eggs, sweet coffee, peanuts, rice, tomatoes, cheroots, which they pushed through the gaol bars . . . this extraordinary treatment was carried out furtively during the following day and night. . . . On the night of 22nd December we were taken to Meiktila by truck. The Japanese officer in charge gave me his overcoat and he himself shivered all the way—another amazing act of conduct. As soon as we arrived, the interrogations began again, and each refusal to answer a question brought a slap, punch or kick.

Next morning we were told we were going to be tortured until we talked . . . we were both strung to a tree with a rope, our hands being tied behind our necks in a very painful stance . . . when Shortis said he would talk, I started a little pre-arranged play in which I cursed him and called him a coward, reminded him of his duty . . . they cut him down and took me to another tree. . . . I stood it for a further half an hour until my body went numb and I was just about to faint when I told them I would talk.

Our ruse to take punishment before we talked seemed to be highly successful because our word did not seem to be doubted from then on. We both told our incredible cover-up story which indicated that we had just arrived in India, had only landed on two aerodromes in India, had taken off from an American aerodrome in Assam, and did not even know the number of our squadron which, we said, was only forming and only had four aircraft.

We were taken to Rangoon in two stages, reaching there on Christmas Day and were put into the cell block, my navigator and I sharing the same cell . . . rice was the staple diet, supplemented in the morning by half a cup of rice-bran and in the evening by a few cups full of very weak soup.

In the Air Force Compound, I was ranking officer, so took over the command of sixty American and forty British officers and men. Compound life was a decided improvement over cell life. We were allowed to mix, talk when we liked and cook our own food. . . . There were three Australians in this compound—Pilot Officer Trigwell, Flying Officer Wilson,[1] who had been a pilot on my squadron and was shot down after I was, and myself. We formed an Australian colony together in one of the upstairs cells.

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[1] F-O J. J. Wilson, AFM, 402431. 82 Sqn RAF. Turner; of Willoughby, NSW; b. North Sydney, 5 Jul 1921. Wilson was shot down on 26 Dec 1944.

Although our treatment was an improvement on the cells, we realised we were being victimised and the Japanese openly told us we were criminal prisoners. This applied to the air force prisoners captured in the last eighteen months. The old air force prisoners were in the army compound and were receiving better treatment. The victimisation of the air force prisoners coincided with the first real bombing of Rangoon by our aircraft and the loss of air supremacy over Burma by the Japanese. It appears that the Japanese took it out on the prisoners because of their failure in the air. Their excuse for the specially bad treatment was that we had killed Burmese women and children and were therefore criminal prisoners.

The number of Australians in the Burma-India theatre had reached a peak strength of 1,091 in July 1944, but by January 1945, because of the repatriation of tour-expired men, the total had fallen to 923. Of these, 590 were serving on 60 operational squadrons, only twenty of which had more than ten Australian aircrew. A total of 86 pilots were distributed among twenty-five fighter squadrons. There were more Australians serving in Liberators than in any other type of aircraft in the command; eleven R.A.F. Liberator squadrons had 291 Australians on their aircrew strength. Dakota transports followed with 126 Australians. Of the total of 923 Australians in the command, 872 were aircrew, and, since only 590 were assigned to squadrons, another 282 aircrew were employed on non-operational duties. Distributed among 46 different units, the disposition of Australians by squadrons was as shown in the accompanying table.

It is clear from these dispositions that the attempt to concentrate Australians in a few squadrons had failed. Wing Commander Pape, writing to Overseas Headquarters on 29th January 1945, reported: "To my way of thinking, nothing whatever has been done in this matter [concentration] in this Command in the twenty months that have elapsed since I first raised the point. . . . Air Ministry stated that it was proposed to concentrate R.A.A.F. personnel in No. 136 Squadron, a fighter squadron. A glance at the list will show that the 'concentration' achieved has been limited to two personnel, and that some 84 other personnel are distributed around 24 other fighter squadrons at an average strength of 3 per squadron."

Pape made further efforts to effect concentrations of Australians early in 1945, but before any progress had been made the decision was taken to repatriate all Australians in the command. It seemed that most Australians did not desire concentration of Australians in squadrons, and Pape was of the view that "the system of mixed squadrons in force in this command, from a morale and operational point of view, produced the best results. Administratively R.A.A.F. squadrons might have lightened our task, but for the efficient prosecution of the war, I feel that our present system is preferable."

The inability of Pape in 1943 to give aircrews in India any idea of when they would be repatriated to Australia had caused discontent, but in January 1944 the introduction of a general repatriation scheme did much to allay this feeling. A total of 341 were repatriated between January 1944 and June 1945. The scheme gave a low priority, however, to men who had been overseas for a long time, but who had never had

| Squadron | Aircraft[2] | No. of personnel | Squadron | Aircraft[2] | No. of personnel |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| FIGHTERS | | | | | |
| 5 | Thunderbolts | 5 | 135 | Thunderbolts | 1 |
| 10 | Hurricanes | 2 | 136 | Spitfires | 2 |
| 11 | Hurricanes | 1 | 146 | Thunderbolts | 4 |
| 17 | Spitfires | 2 | 152 | Spitfires | 5 |
| 20 | Hurricanes | 3 | 155 | Spitfires | 2 |
| 30 | Thunderbolts | 4 | 258 | Thunderbolts | 6 |
| 34 | Hurricanes | 5 | 261 | Thunderbolts | 4 |
| 42 | Hurricanes | 1 | 273 | Spitfires | 4 |
| 60 | Hurricanes | 1 | 607 | Spitfires | 3 |
| 67 | Spitfires | 2 | 615 | Spitfires | 7 |
| 79 | Thunderbolts | 4 | 681 | Spitfire (photo-recce) | 9 |
| 113 | Hurricanes | 2 | | | — |
| 123 | Thunderbolts | 2 | | | 86 |
| 134 | Hurricanes | 5 | | | — |
| TRANSPORT SQUADRONS (229 GROUP) | | | | | |
| 31 | Dakota | 20 | 194 | Dakota | 20 |
| 52 | Dakota | 14 | 353 | Dakota | 10 |
| 62 | Dakota | 28 | 435 | Dakota (R.C.A.F.) | 4 |
| 117 | Dakota | 26 | 426 | Dakota | 4 |
| TWIN-ENGINE FIGHTERS | | | | | |
| 22 | Beaufighter | 2 | 176 | Beaufighter | 3 |
| 27 | Beaufighter | 1 | 211 | Beaufighter | 1 |
| 89 | Beaufighter | 1 | 217 | Beaufighter | 1 |
| LIGHT BOMBER | | | | | |
| 82 | Mosquito | 4 | 45 | Mosquito | 12 |
| 110 | Vengeance | 2 | 684 | Mosquito (photo-recce) | 4 |
| HEAVY BOMBER | | | | | |
| 99 | Liberator | 26 | 356 | Liberator | 16 |
| 159 | Liberator | 38 | 357 | Liberator (Special Duty) | 29 |
| 215 | Liberator | 31 | 358 | Liberator | 28 |
| 355 | Liberator | 36 | | | |
| LONG-RANGE GENERAL-RECONNAISSANCE | | | | | |
| 160 | Liberator | 43 | 203 | Liberator | 15 |
| 200 | Liberator | 16 | 354 | Liberator | 13 |
| FLYING-BOAT | | | | | |
| 191 | Catalina | 5 | 230 | Sunderland | 4 |
| 205 | Catalina | 11 | 240 | Catalina | 7 |
| AIR-SEA RESCUE | | | | | |
| 212 | Catalina | 7 | 292 | Warwick | 22 |
| | | | | **Total** | **590** |

[2] Many of the Hurricane squadrons were later converted to Thunderbolts.

an opportunity to complete an operational tour. Moreover, the numbers repatriated depended on a quota system and men who were eligible for repatriation had to remain in the command for some months before repatriation could be effected. "There is no doubt," reported Pape, "that by failing to provide for a definite tour of duty in the Empire Air Training Agreements, we fostered a good deal of unnecessary discontent among aircrews."

Having pursued the *XV Japanese Army* since June of 1944, the British Fourteenth Army had, by mid-December 1944, not only reached the Chindwin River but was across it in strength at Sittaung, Kalewa and Mawlaik. Throughout December the leading formations of the Fourteenth Army advanced beyond the Chindwin and, by the end of 1944, XXXIII Corps had a firm footing on the central Burma plain. The troops had had to abandon jungle-war tactics and adapt themselves to swiftly-moving battles in flat open country, where mechanisation would play a full part.

General Slim's intention, at this stage, was to fight the main enemy strength in the Shwebo plain, but the Japanese withdrew from this area to Mandalay-Meiktila. The new commander of the Japanese *Burma Area Army,* Lieut-General Kimura, had decided, contrary to Allied belief, not to fight in the Shwebo plain and had ordered his *31st Division* to hold it only long enough to allow the remainder of the shattered *XV Army* to cross the Irrawaddy.[3] This movement had begun in October 1944, but Mountbatten's Intelligence staff did not become aware of it until December.[4] Slim, when he was satisfied that the enemy had no intention of seriously defending the Shwebo plain, produced a plan by which the Fourteenth Army would cross the Irrawaddy and fight the major battle at the end of February in the plains around Mandalay and the hills around Meiktila. Of this plan, Mountbatten in his report said:

> Lieut-General Slim's plan, of which Lieut-General Leese and I entirely approved, was as brilliant in its conception as in its subsequent successful execution; for it laid the foundation for the complete destruction of the Japanese Army in Burma. It was a bold plan, relying for its fulfilment on secrecy, on speed, and on taking great administrative risks.

In outline, the plan was for XXXIII Corps to make a crossing north of Mandalay to draw the main enemy forces, while the major blow by IV Corps fell south of the enemy concentrations guarding the river below Mandalay. Subsequent exploitation would be an advance by IV Corps down the Irrawaddy Valley and by XXXIII Corps down the Mandalay-Rangoon railway. The plan was embodied in an Operations Instruction of 19th December, by which tasks allotted were:

XXXIII Corps:

(*a*) To capture or construct airfields in the Ye-u—Shwebo areas.

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[3] Vice-Adm Earl Mountbatten, *Report to the Combined Chiefs of Staff by the Supreme Allied Commander South-East Asia 1943-1945,* p. 102.

[4] Mountbatten Report, p. 102. In his dispatch on the Operations in Burma, Nov 1944-Aug 1945, Lt-Gen Sir Oliver Leese described intelligence about the enemy in the Burma theatre as poor both in quantity and quality.

(*b*) To capture Monywa.
(*c*) To capture Mandalay.
(*d*) To be prepared to advance on the general axis Mandalay-Nyaunglebin.

IV Corps:

(*a*) To capture Pakokku.
(*b*) To seize a bridge-head across the Irrawaddy.
(*c*) To capture Meiktila and the Meiktila groups of airfields.
(*d*) To be prepared to advance southwards on the general axis Myingyan-Henzada.

In the Northern Combat Area Command operations had been weakened and slowed down by the withdrawal over the "Hump" in December of two divisions of Chinese troops. They were needed in China where a Japanese thrust was threatening Kunming. Not only the withdrawal of these Chinese troops, but deprivation of the air transports to move them, affected the offensive everywhere in Burma, because the air forces were operating without any margin of reserve. Nevertheless, by December, N.C.A.C. forces were firmly established on the Irrawaddy at three key points, and on 27th January forces under Lieut-General Daniel I. Sultan, of the U.S. Army, had advanced sufficiently to allow the opening of a land route to China from Ledo through Myitkyina.

On the third South-East Asia Command front—the Arakan front—XV Corps had, on 4th November, been assigned the task of advancing by land with the object of clearing the area north of the general line Foul Point-Kudaung Island-Minbya. In addition, an amphibious assault on Akyab Island was to be launched as early as possible in 1945, with the aim of clearing the island by the end of January. The main purpose of this operation was to secure air bases. Since air supply remained the key to the ground operations in Burma, it was essential to secure air bases at Akyab so that the Fourteenth Army could advance into southern Burma.

Late in November 1944 XV Corps was engaged in clearing features of tactical importance and the main offensive got under way in December. By 9th December the 81st (West African) Division had crossed the Kaladan River. On 15th December Buthidaung fell to the 82nd (West African) Division. In the coastal sector the advance of the 25th Indian Division had been rapid. On 23rd December it was at Foul Point, looking across the water at Akyab Island. Akyab itself was occupied on 3rd January. A heavy air strike was planned at Akyab as preparation for the assault, but the Japanese had left without defending it. The island now provided an air base for Dakota transports and for tactical air units which could strike at the enemy's left flank. On 12th January, nine days after the Akyab landing, another landing was made on the mainland at Myebon. Thunderbolt, Hurricane and Mitchell aircraft neutralised the defences prior to the assault. Inland, at Kangaw, the enemy defenders hung on grimly to their positions and the Strategic Air Force was called on to give direct support. In three days aircraft flew 1,150 sorties against targets in and around the Kangaw battle area. This air offensive began on 25th January, but it was not until the capture of an

important hill to the east of Kangaw on 1st February that the turning point of the battle was reached.

No. 3 (Thunderbolt) Squadron took part in the bombing at Kangaw, beginning on 26th January. On the first day five Australians bombed a hill feature where 900 Japanese had been reported. On 30th January Americans fitted twelve Thunderbolts of the squadron with napalm fire bombs and these aircraft bombed again at Kangaw. The squadron reported that the napalm seemed to be more effective than 500-lb bombs "as many fires were left burning". The squadron attacked again at Kangaw on 6th February to "soften up" defences before a ground attack was carried out.

Liberator bombers of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons joined in the assault at Kangaw on 28th January. Some thirty Australians were in these Liberators which were detailed to attack bunker and defensive positions west of the town. The bombing was accurate and crews reported that baulks of timber were flung into the air, presumably from revetments. An hour before the crews landed back at base a message of congratulations on the accuracy and effectiveness of the attack was received from ground observers.

Meanwhile, another amphibious landing had been carried out at Ramree Island sixty miles south of Akyab on 21st January. This landing had been supported by the heavy bombing and strafing of British and American Liberators, Spitfires, Lightnings and Thunderbolts. The Liberators of these squadrons bombed gun positions and defensive works. Two aircraft of No. 99 Squadron collided in the air while forming up before going to Ramree and three Australians in them were killed. The Liberators encountered no opposition over the target.

In January and early February of 1945, Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons had also carried out many strategic assignments, particularly against railway targets in Burma and Siam. On 1st January six Liberators of No. 215 were over the Burma-Siam railway in daylight and one of these (captained by Warrant Officer Palmer[5]) scored a direct hit on a locomotive. Liberators from this squadron again attacked the railway on 8th and 11th January and, on the 13th, eight from the squadron were given tactical targets at Mandalay. Targets at Mandalay included a concentration of Japanese troops and supplies in the area of the police lines and training school and the football ground near Fort Dufferin. The attacks on these targets were well concentrated and caused three groups of fires. It was later estimated that this and other air attacks inflicted 1,000 enemy casualties. During the bombing, Thunderbolt aircraft suppressed enemy anti-aircraft fire.

On 18th January some twenty-eight Australians were in crews of aircraft of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons which attacked Meiktila airfield. Twenty-four Liberators from these two squadrons were escorted to the target area by Lightnings and Thunderbolts which rendezvoused with them over Chittagong. The bombers concentrated on both runways and put the air-

[5] F-O K. G. Palmer, 405799. 62 and 215 Sqns RAF. Sales and advertising representative; of Brisbane; b. Atherton, Qld, 23 Nov 1916.

field out of action temporarily. On the 25th both squadrons concentrated their assault on the railhead and industrial installations at Amarapura near Mandalay.

To the north, the 19th Indian Division of XXXIII Corps had taken Shwebo on 7th January 1945, and on 9th January had established a bridge-head across the Irrawaddy at Thabeikkyin, north-east of Shwebo and at Kyaukmyaung on 16th January.

Meanwhile, to the south, IV Corps troops, after fighting a serious engagement at Gangaw, which they captured on 12th January with the aid of strong air support, were now headed south for Pakokku on the Irrawaddy. Pilots of Nos. 79, 146, and 261 (Thunderbolt) Squadrons carried out close support operations in the Gangaw area during the fighting there.

Another division (the 20th Indian) of XXXIII Corps was approaching the Irrawaddy via Monywa where it struck stiff resistance. Air support was called for and Mosquitos, Thunderbolts and Hurricanes bombed and strafed while Spitfires gave top cover. On 20th January three squadrons of Thunderbolt aircraft, including three aircraft piloted by Australians (Cleary of No. 261 Squadron, Flying Officer Hopwood[6] of No. 79, and Flight Lieutenant Prentice[7] of No. 146) strafed the enemy as Allied troops left their positions and advanced. News came through later that the operation had been a great success and Monywa had fallen. These three Thunderbolt squadrons also bombed Meiktila airfields regularly during January.

In February the battle for the Irrawaddy bridge-heads entered the decisive phase. The 19th Division, which crossed the river in January, retained its bridge-head against heavy counter-attack. On 12th February the 20th Division crossed near Allagappa, west of Mandalay. Twelve days later (24th February) the 2nd British Division crossed at Ngazun, a village between Mandalay and the 20th Indian Division's bridge-head. Meanwhile, two divisions of IV Corps, with Meiktila as their ultimate objective, crossed at Nyaungu, to the south-west of Pakokku, between 13th and 19th February.

While the British main thrust was the IV Corps drive towards Meiktila, the Japanese believed, as it was intended they should believe, that the 19th Indian Division was the advanced guard of IV Corps and set out to exterminate it before its two bridge-heads could be consolidated. The commander of the *XV Japanese Army* sent the bulk of two divisions—*15th* and *53rd*—against the bridge-head together with the bulk of his army artillery. The enemy launched one infantry attack after another, day and night, but the 19th Indian Division held on. During the battle, which lasted nearly a month, No. 221 Group gave close air support. Squadrons of Thunderbolts (including Nos. 79, 146 and 261) and Mitchells struck

[6] F-O G. E. Hopwood, 401511; 79 Sqn. Farmer; of Baree Creek, NSW; b. Lockhart, NSW, 7 Apr 1920.

[7] F-Lt S. J. Prentice, 402135. 148, 211, 84 and 146 Sqns RAF. Accountant; of Waverley, NSW; b. Sydney, 9 Mar 1919.

at enemy artillery positions. All three Thunderbolt squadrons were engaged in support of this division on 27th January, when, late in the afternoon, they bombed and strafed Japanese heavy artillery at Singu. Squadron Leader May led twelve aircraft of No. 79 on this strike. No. 261 Squadron and No. 146 also attacked. The strike at Singu must have had good effect. The 19th Indian Division reported that in the twenty-four hours preceding the attack, 450 shells from the artillery positions had fallen among its men, whereas in the succeeding twenty-four hours only 42 were fired.

On 8th February the three Thunderbolt squadrons took part in another attack in the same target area. Mosquitos and Mitchells had attacked the target for an hour before the Thunderbolts arrived and, after they had bombed and strafed, Hurricanes followed up the attack. Again on 11th February the three Thunderbolt squadrons attacked at Singu, each squadron taking a third of the town. May again led eleven other aircraft of No. 79 Squadron.

The 19th Indian Division, by its success in holding its ground, made a valuable contribution to the campaign because it diverted a large number of the enemy while the Allied main forces were massing elsewhere.

On 8th February the Strategic Air Force assisted the IV Corps' crossing in the Pakokku area by carrying out attacks along the Irrawaddy, south of Nyaungu. Three days later the Strategic Air Force mounted the heaviest air attack in the Burma campaign against Rangoon. Fifty-six American Superfortresses as well as Liberators of both the R.A.F. and U.S.A.A.F. took part, escorted by sixty-seven Lightnings and Thunderbolts. The objective was vital Japanese supplies which, if destroyed, would have an important effect on the campaign. Australians in Nos. 99, 215 and 355 Squadrons took part. Dense black smoke rose to 10,000 feet after the attack by the Liberators. Seven aircraft of No. 99 Squadron were damaged by anti-aircraft fire. The Liberator crews observed three Tonys and one possible Oscar near the target. One Tony, which flew under and to the rear of Liberators of No. 215 Squadron, was destroyed by concentrated fire from the gunners before it could attack. Squadron Leader MacDonald led twelve Thunderbolts of No. 134, which provided medium escort on this strike.

Next day, the 12th February, the Liberators of Nos. 99 and 215 attacked a tactical target on the Japanese-held side of the Irrawaddy, opposite Myinmu, after which the 20th Indian Division crossed and advanced along the south bank of the river towards Mandalay. Through the remainder of February the Liberators, Thunderbolts and Dakota transports supported the Fourteenth Army in its multiple crossings of the Irrawaddy River.

In an attempt to restore the position in Burma, General Kimura, the Japanese commander, planned an offensive from Madaya and Sagaing towards Wetlet on the Shwebo railway line against XXXIII Corps, beginning on 10th March 1945. He also directed a force to attack IV Corps in the Pakokku area, but the small scale of this latter counter-attack (less

than a division was to be used) showed that Kimura still did not appreciate the dimensions of the threat in that area.

While the Japanese concentrated for the attack against XXXIII Corps, the thrust by IV Corps against the key centre of Meiktila was developing. The dash on Meiktila started on 21st February, and by 26th February the important Thabutkon airfield was captured, enabling the fly-in of a brigade from Palel, while British tanks were engaged only five miles from Meiktila itself. By the morning of 4th March all Meiktila north of the railway had been cleared. The enemy, surprised by the fall of Meiktila, called off his counter-offensive against XXXIII Corps and diverted it to Meiktila, although this diversion would be almost impossible to effect adequately. Meanwhile, on 20th March Mandalay had fallen to the 19th Indian Division. In the Meiktila area there was continuous fighting and the enemy closely pressed the airstrip two miles north of Meiktila, resulting in a severe curtailment of air supply. By 29th March, however, the whole area had been cleared and Kimura, accepting defeat, had ordered a general withdrawal. The difficulties of the Japanese were increased on 28th March, when the *Burma Defence Army,* raised by the Japanese, deserted and joined the Allies.

In addition to a large number flying on the vital air transport operations, Australians in a total of eighteen squadrons were engaged during the crucial battles in central Burma in March 1945. On 4th March Australians in thirteen squadrons took part in air operations. The most notable achievement on this day was the shooting down of two Lily bombers over Sinthe by Warrant Officer Johnson[8] of No. 89 (Beaufighter) Squadron. Operating at night, bombers of the Japanese air force attacked Onbauk airfield, destroying a Hurricane on the ground. Johnson was scrambled in a night-fighter Beaufighter and shot down two enemy aircraft within a period of three hours. Describing the action against the second Lily bomber, Johnson said:

> The belly gunner of this Lily answered my first long burst with return fire which luckily did not hit the target. I followed almost immediately with a second long burst from point blank range which struck the fuselage causing the aircraft to burst into flames. He slowed up so quickly that I had to take swift action to avoid colliding as I was close behind him.

Nearly every operation of Nos. 79, 146 and 261 (Thunderbolt) Squadrons during March was in support of the Fourteenth Army. They attacked Japanese troops and stores and flew cab-rank patrols.[9] Two of these squadrons carried out attacks on Fort Dufferin, in the centre of Mandalay, during the assault on 20th March. Starting at 11 a.m., the final attack began with thirty-five Mitchells which bombed in three waves near the north wall of the Fort. The Mitchells were followed by Hurricanes of No. 221 Group, which, coming in singly, bombed and strafed the entire area of the fort. Then came the Thunderbolt squadrons each carrying

[8] P-O H. J. C. Johnson, 416582. 89 and 684 Sqns RAF. Porter; of Wanilla, via Pt Lincoln, SA; b. Streaky Bay, SA, 21 Apr 1922.

[9] Cab-rank—a system wherein close-support aircraft remained over the battlefield on call. The quick response to such requests defeated the old problem of the time lag.

two 500-lb bombs. Nos. 79 (led by May) and 261 came in at deck level to drop their bombs against the 14-foot-high wall surrounding the historic fort. Ten of their bombs were direct hits on the wall and, having eleven seconds' delay fuses, these bombs were able to penetrate several feet before exploding. With one exception, all bombs which missed the wall fell just inside the fort. These attacks, along with short-range artillery fire, made many breaches. After this aerial attack, the 19th Indian Division advanced into the fort, but the soldiers found that the enemy had abandoned it, moving out under cover of darkness the previous night.

In April two Australian pilots of No. 146 Squadron were lost: Warrant Officer Keightley[1] when on cab-rank duty, and Pilot Officer Westgarth,[2] when on returning from patrol he collided with a Harvard aircraft over his base.

Thunderbolt pilots in Nos. 5 and 134 Squadrons were frequently in action on cab-rank duty over the battle areas, especially around Meiktila, during March and April. On the 17th March three sections of No. 134 Squadron on cab-rank duty over Meiktila were called in to attack gun positions from which the enemy were directing artillery fire on to the airfield at Meiktila. Squadron Leader MacDonald led his section to attack a village just north of Meiktila where several fires were started, then to a gun which was seen to be shelling the airfield from a position near the lake. Two bombs from the Thunderbolts burst only 30 feet from the gun position and silenced it.

The Liberator Squadrons on which the Australians served carried out several heavy bombardments of Rangoon during March, in addition to attacking Martaban, Bangkok and targets along the Burma-Siam railway. No. 159 Squadron also laid mines at Moulmein, Amherst, Heinze Bay, Tavoy, Mergui and Bangkok, as well as carrying out special-duties missions, including pathfinding, specialist bombing and leaflet dropping.

On 3rd February 1945 the Combined Chiefs of Staff had informed Mountbatten that his first objective was now to liberate Burma as soon as possible and that his next main task would be the liberation of Malaya and the opening of the Strait of Malacca. Mountbatten therefore planned to capture Rangoon before the onset of the monsoon.

In March 1945 Chiang Kai-shek informed Mountbatten of his intention to withdraw Chinese troops from Burma. This factor, together with the pressure on air transport for the Fourteenth Army, made the possibility of reaching Rangoon before the monsoon seem doubtful. However, on 4th April the U.S. Chief of Staff, General Marshall, informed Mountbatten that the Americans had no intention of removing their air resources from South-East Asia before the capture of Rangoon, or the 1st June, whichever was the earlier date. There was therefore a strong incentive to take Rangoon before the monsoon, but, because of the delay by the

[1] W-O M. C. Keightley, 416968; 146 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of Unley, SA; b. Keswick, SA, 17 Dec 1923. Killed in action 24 Apr 1945.

[2] P-O D. D. Westgarth, 413463; 146 Sqn RAF. Articled clerk; of Sydney; b. Blayney, NSW, 13 Oct 1921. Killed in action 25 Apr 1945.

strong Japanese defence around Meiktila, General Leese doubted the Fourteenth Army's ability to reach Rangoon by land so soon, and it was therefore decided to carry out an amphibious and airborne operation against this port on 2nd May. It was essential that DRACULA (as this operation was named) be given close air support and Mountbatten therefore ordered Leese to ensure that the Fourteenth Army captured suitable airfields in southern Burma from which this support could be mounted.

Thus the advance on Rangoon became a race against the monsoon. Already in April, as IV Corps pushed southward along the railway to Rangoon and XXXIII Corps south-west to Magwe, the first heavy storms were beginning. The Strategic Air Force, in preparation for DRACULA, concentrated on the bombardment of Rangoon and the Burma-Siam railway. American Superfortresses joined in systematic attacks on the stockpile of Japanese stores at Rangoon. On 29th March Liberators of Nos. 99 and 215 Squadrons, as well as aircraft from three American squadrons, escorted by Mustangs, attacked Rangoon in daylight. Their target was the Japanese Army Headquarters, and a good concentration of bombs caused heavy damage to buildings in the target area. Nos. 99, 215, 355 and 356 Squadrons (led by Squadron-Leader Williams[3]) again attacked Rangoon on 5th April. Heavy cloud was encountered over the target area, but by a lucky chance the aiming point (a conspicuous winding road inside the target area) was seen through a gap in the clouds. However, all bombs were lost to view in the clouds soon after release and results could not be observed.

In the remaining days of April the Liberator squadrons (except No. 215 which was taken off operations for conversion to transports) continued the air assault on Rangoon dumps. No. 355 attacked on the 11th, 23rd, 25th and 27th April and on 1st May.

Meanwhile, the Fourteenth Army had regrouped and, leaving the 19th Indian Division to clear up enemy pockets, pushed southwards in the first week of April. The 7th Indian Division, advancing down both sides of the Irrawaddy, captured Kyaukpadaung on 12th April, and Yenangyaung on the 22nd April, while the 20th Indian Division took Allanmyo on the 25th April and Prome on the 2nd May. The IV Corps, which had begun a parallel advance down the Mandalay-Rangoon railway on 30th March, had reached Toungoo by 21st April. It was considered vital that the Toungoo airfields should be in Allied possession by 25th April for use as a base from which close air support could be given to DRACULA. It was subjected to a heavy bombing by forty Liberators on 21st April and armoured columns, followed by a brigade of the 5th Indian Division, swept into the town next day. By 24th April three of its airfields were ready for operations. On 29th April IV Corps had reached Pegu, and, although held up by torrential rains which began on this day, continued its advance to Rangoon on 2nd May.

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[3] Sqn Ldr R. D. Williams, DFC, 400609. 139, 62 and 215 Sqns RAF. Insurance clerk; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. South Yarra, Vic, 9 Sep 1918.

Tactical air support for the Rangoon operation was to be given by No. 224 Group from Ramree and Akyab Islands. Nos. 5, 123, 134 and 258 (Thunderbolt) Squadrons of this group were moved to Ramree. Additional air support for the Fourteenth Army would come from No. 221 Group squadrons operating from the newly-won Toungoo airfields. For the paratroop landing at Rangoon, Dakotas were to be used. Some of the Australians in these squadrons were trained as "jumpmasters" for the Indian paratroopers.

However, Rangoon proved to be an anti-climax. The Japanese had withdrawn from it on the 25th April. Early on the 1st May an aircraft flying over the town reported that a message had been painted on the roof of the Rangoon gaol saying the Japanese had gone. Still wielding a whitewash brush, a figure was seen painting another sign—a piece of air force idiom which left no doubt as to its authenticity. The message had been painted on the orders of Hudson, who, as senior British officer, had taken over command at Rangoon when the Japanese evacuated. However, no action was taken by the air command and bombing continued throughout 1st and 2nd May. On the afternoon of 2nd May, however, Wing Commander Saunders,[4] R.A.F., landed his Mosquito at Mingaladon airfield near the city and finding no Japanese in the area contacted Hudson in the gaol. Saunders then sent a sampan down river towards the oncoming amphibious force, while Hudson took a small party to Mingaladon and organised local labour into preparing a strip for the supply aircraft which would soon be landing.[5]

Meanwhile, air transports escorted by fighters had arrived over the dropping zone on 1st May and after an air bombardment a battalion of the 50th Indian Parachute Brigade was dropped on both sides of the Rangoon River and proceeded to destroy the enemy defences. On 3rd May the 26th Indian Division, which had landed the previous day, entered Rangoon, suffering only 100 casualties up to 5th May when the occupation of the city was complete.

Nos. 159 and 355 Squadrons supported the advance on 1st and 2nd May. On 1st May the Liberators of these squadrons, taking off in bright moonlight, attacked gun positions at Elephant Point. On this day also, Squadron Leader May led twelve Thunderbolts in missions over Rangoon.

On 2nd May eight aircraft of No. 355 Squadron attacked gun positions near the city. Bad weather was encountered and one Liberator, in which were Flight Sergeants Pullen[6] and Nicolson,[7] was forced down in the sea. Pullen and an R.A.F. air gunner, were the only two survivors

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[4] W Cdr A. E. Saunders, OBE, 37052, RAF. Comd 418 Sqn RCAF 1942, 110 Sqn RAF 1944-45. Regular air force offr; b. Sliema, Malta, 2 May 1916. Killed in aircraft accident 11 Jul 1945.

[5] Eight other Australians, as well as Hudson, were held captive at Rangoon and were released when the Japanese evacuated. They were: F-O's D. C. Cropper (of Kirribilli, NSW), E. W. M. Trigwell, J. J. Wilson; W-O H. Besley (Bonshaw, NSW), and F-Sgts J. Coffin (Littlehampton, SA), R. T. Hadden (Pingaring, WA), J. P. F. Reid (Brisbane) and M. S. Woods (Clare, SA).

[6] W-O M. H. Pullen, 434840; 355 Sqn RAF. Clerk; of North Melbourne; b. North Melbourne, 6 Jan 1921.

[7] F-Sgt D. T. Nicolson, 428122. 355 Sqn RAF. Farmer and grazier; of Campbell Town, Tas; b. Campbell Town, 4 Jan 1920. Killed in action 2 May 1945.

clinging to the wreckage in the water when they were rescued by an air-sea rescue Catalina.

With the capture of Rangoon the American Air Forces were withdrawn from operations in the Burma theatre, since the primary objective of American participation in India-Burma had been aiding China to "permit the full co-utilisation of the area and resources of China for operations against the Japanese".[8] The task remaining in Burma was the cleaning out of the large enemy concentrations which bided their time in the Pegu Yomas, awaiting an opportunity to escape across the Sittang River into Siam. The attempt was made in July and resulted in the killing of 6,270 enemy and the capturing of 740 prisoners of a total enemy force of between 18,000 and 20,000. The enemy was heavily attacked by air strikes and ground forces in the foothills and when the break out began Spitfires maintained a cab-rank patrol. Flying Officer Bohane,[9] a Spitfire pilot of No. 607 Squadron, who took part in these operations in June and July, was killed in a jeep accident at Mingaladon on 17th July. He had been on his second tour of operations with No. 607, and his last operation of this tour was completed the day before.

With the end of the fighting in Europe, the Australian Government recalled all Australians serving with the Royal Air Force. Overseas Headquarters, London, had signalled Pape on 28th May as follows:

> Policy now laid down by Air Ministry provides that all R.A.A.F. aircrew serving South-East Asia are to be replaced by R.A.F. personnel as soon as possible, irrespective of tour position . . . this will involve complete evacuation South-East Asia of all R.A.A.F. personnel and it is expected that this can be achieved by end of year.

The Australians, on repatriation, would be discharged from the air force, or posted for service in the South-West Pacific Area according to the amount of operational service rendered. It was intended that the unscrambling of R.A.A.F. aircrew would be a smooth operation which would maintain the operational efficiency of those R.A.F. squadrons from which the Australians would be withdrawn. For this reason, priorities were formed to provide for unscrambling in the following order: (1) fighter pilots, (2) heavy bomber crews, (3) crews of transport aircraft. The policy came into operation in June 1945, and quickly saw a rapid decrease in the number of Australian fighter pilots left in the Spitfire and Thunderbolt squadrons giving support to the army in the bloody mopping-up battles in June and July.

In May 1945 seventy-one Australian aircrew had arrived in India bringing the number of Australians serving in South-East Asia to 990. Shipping was not available immediately for the general repatriation scheme and it was not until 29th September 1945 that a draft of 595 were

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[8] Mountbatten Report, p. 121.

[9] F-O B. J. Bohane, 405614; 607 Sqn RAF. Bank clerk; of Toombul, Qld; b. Brisbane, 13 Feb 1923. Killed in accident 17 Jul 1945.

embarked at Calcutta in the *Sontay*. Another draft of 255 were embarked in the *Athlone Castle* at Bombay on 17th December. Other drafts of Australians, including many who had been held prisoner by the Japanese, were repatriated by aircraft via Cocos Islands. The final draft of twelve men, in the charge of Squadron Leader Cook,[1] left New Delhi on 27th January 1946 for Colombo, where early in February they embarked in H.M.S. *London* for Australia.

[1] Sqn Ldr R. S. Cook, 4226. 11 PDRC, and RAAF Liaison Office, New Delhi. Regular airman; of Wattle Glen, Vic; b. Boulder City, WA, 21 Sep 1907.

## CHAPTER 26

# MOROTAI—APRIL 1945

GENERAL MacArthur's forces continued to advance towards the Japanese home islands. By March 1945 the Far East Air Force, operating from new bases in the Philippines, had established air command over Formosan skies and the south China coast. On 1st April, with air cover provided by carrier aircraft of the United States Fifth Fleet, supported by the British Pacific Fleet "employing a method of sea warfare with which previously it had been unfamiliar", American infantry went ashore at Okinawa, one of the Ryuku Islands. Once established on the Ryukus, the Americans would be able to operate land-based fighter aircraft against southern Japan. On Okinawa, the American Tenth Army was opposed by *XXXII Japanese Army* with a strength of 77,000 well-armed and determined Japanese.[1]

In Japan, it had been publicly proclaimed that there would not be "another Iwo Jima", and the Japanese defenders of Okinawa made resolute attempts both on land and in the air to hold the American advance. They used their Kamikaze suicide-attacks on a large scale and with some success. The British fleet's assignment in this operation had been to neutralise the airfields on the Sakishima Islands, but the heavy damage done by the suicide attacks to the lightly-armoured American aircraft carriers led to an increase in the relative effort of the more strongly-armoured British carriers.[2]

General Marshall, reporting to the Secretary of War, said:

> By mid-June, the Japanese had lost 20 per cent of their total combat aircraft strength in the battle for Okinawa; in all, 3,400 Japanese planes were shot down over the Ryukyus and Kyushu and 800 more were destroyed on the ground. During the same period our losses totalled more than a thousand aircraft.

Meanwhile, far to the south, the VICTOR operations were continuing. Landings had been made on Panay, Cebu and Negros in the central Philippines. The Far East Air Force had been constantly striking at Jolo, Tawitawi and north Borneo bases, and on the 3rd April, American forces went ashore at Tawitawi Island, about 50 miles from the north-eastern tip of Borneo. Emergency landing fields were to be established at Tawitawi for the use of aircraft that would later provide support for the landing of the Australian forces at Tarakan.

Unopposed landings were next made at Jolo and Basilan, completing the Allied grip on the Sulu archipelago, a string of islands stretching like a necklace from the southern Philippines to Borneo. A further landing was made in the Cotabato area of Mindanao, on the 17th April. This landing virtually completed the VICTOR phase of the MONTCLAIR opera-

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[1] See Appleman, Burns, Gugeler and Stevens, *Okinawa: The Last Battle* (1948), pp. 483-5, in the official series, *United States Army in World War II.*

[2] Despatch by Admiral Sir Bruce A. Fraser, Commander-in-Chief, British Pacific Fleet.

tions: the comprehensive plan to reoccupy large areas in the southern Philippines, the Netherlands East Indies, and British North Borneo. These areas, though under Japanese military control, had been ignored, except for air bombardments, by the South-West Pacific forces as they pressed on towards the Japanese mainland.

An important assumption made at this time was "that hostile forces in areas of operation will continue to resist re-establishment of control by the United Nations and that such resistance will be maintained in each defensive area regardless of events in other areas".[3]

The Dutch were anxious to recover their lost colonies, and their representatives in Washington had long been urging the early expulsion of the Japanese from the Netherlands East Indies, on the ground that the inhabitants both white and native were in distress under Japanese rule. Vice-Admiral Helfrich and Rear-Admiral Van der Nook had addressed the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the subject soon after the Quebec conference of September 1944. Again in May and June 1945 they were seeking from America both air and sea transport assistance to speed the transfer of Dutch troops from Holland to Australia, where they would be trained for operations to recapture Dutch possessions in the Indies.[4]

With the VICTOR phase of the MONTCLAIR operations completed, the OBOE phase—operations in the Netherlands East Indies—was now about to begin.

General MacArthur required the Australian Army to furnish the ground force, and the Royal Australian Air Force the air component for these operations. The over-all objective of the OBOE phase was the "early seizure of Java in order to destroy the principal concentration of hostile forces in the Netherlands East Indies; to re-establish the government of the Netherlands East Indies in its recognised capital; and to establish a firm base of operations for subsequent consolidation".

Originally, the intention was to have six distinct OBOE operations:

OBOE 1—Tarakan Island (20th April 1945).
OBOE 2—Balikpapan (18th May).
OBOE 3—Bandjermasin (28th May).
OBOE 4—Surabaya, or Batavia (27th June).
OBOE 5—East Netherlands East Indies.
OBOE 6—British Borneo.

The Bandjermasin operation (OBOE 3) would only be mounted if carrier-based air support could not be made available to cover the assault on Surabaya. If British fleet carriers were available to give necessary air support, OBOE 4 would be a landing at Batavia rather than Surabaya.

On 4th April, however, the Joint Chiefs of Staff ordered MacArthur to prepare to occupy North Borneo immediately after Tarakan (OBOE 1), using Australian troops. On the 8th April, General Headquarters announced that the operations against Bandjermasin-Surabaya-Java, and

[3] MONTCLAIR basic outline plan for reoccupation of the western Visayan-Mindanao-Borneo-NEI area, prepared by G3 Planning, GHQ, 25 Feb 1945.

[4] W. D. Leahy, *I Was There* (1950), p. 438.

the consolidation of the rest of the Netherlands East Indies were suspended, and that OBOE 6 operation was amended to an attack into the Labuan-Brunei Bay area of British North Borneo. The hostile garrison there was to be destroyed, and oil and rubber resources protected.

It was significant that the three operations of the OBOE series which were still to be mounted would take the Allies into the oil-producing centres. Tarakan, Balikpapan and the Seria-Lutong areas in British North Borneo were all producers of oil.

MacArthur's declared policy had been to move as quickly as possible towards major strategic objectives, leaving large pockets of enemy resistance to "die on the vine". The MONTCLAIR plan was therefore a clear departure from his earlier policy, as was the mopping-up campaign in the Philippines. The Australian War Cabinet in May 1945 showed some misgiving about these operations. A War Cabinet Minute of 28th May recorded:

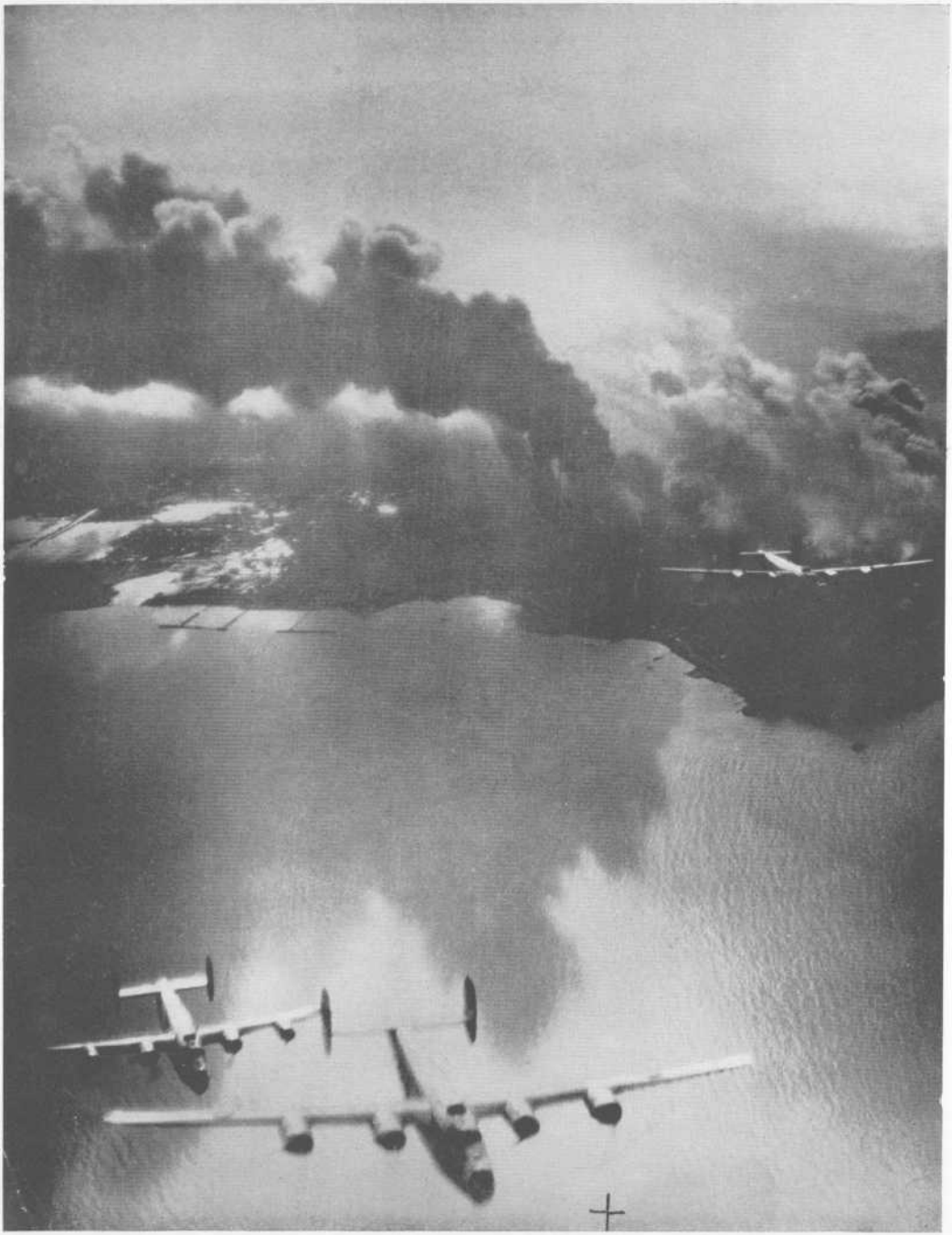
> There have been criticisms that the liquidation of by-passed Japanese forces is not by itself a worthwhile effort of our forces. The reasons for the non-participation in the Philippines campaigns have been made clear. But with American progress towards Japan, the operations against Borneo, the N.E.I. and Malaya, have assumed the nature of large-scale mopping-up campaigns. From the aspect of prestige, it is of greater importance to Australia to be associated with the drive to defeat Japan, though for reasons of British and Australian prestige, it would be desirable to have a token force in the recapture of Malaya, in order to avenge the defeat of 1941.

It was clear that political, as well as strictly military considerations, were having an influence on the course of operations in the Pacific. It was true that there was oil to be obtained in Borneo, and Admiral Halsey had reported in January that excessive demands were being made by the Third Fleet on supplies of fuel and lubricants. He had said: "As combat operations approach the Empire, it must be anticipated that fleet oilers will be lost to enemy action. Until the sources of Borneo and the Netherlands East Indies become available, the trans-Pacific supply of fuel, and the means to distribute it, must be more than adequate if the Asiatic war is to be vigorously prosecuted."[5]

The denial of Netherlands East Indies oil to Japan would not achieve any worthwhile objective since the Japanese were scarcely capable of transporting the fuel to the homeland where it was needed. Not only had most of their shipping been sunk, but their lines of communication between Borneo and the mainland of Japan had been almost completely severed by Allied naval and air interdiction. They could still, of course, use the oil locally. Admiral King, in his third report to the Secretary of the Navy, refers to the operations against Borneo as being designed "to deny the enemy the fruits of his conquests in the Netherlands East Indies and his use of the approaches to those areas. These included the capture of Tarakan to obtain its petroleum resources and to provide an airfield for support of the Balikpapan operation. . . ."

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[5] Adm Halsey to Adm King, 25 Jan 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Oil wells at Balikpapan burn fiercely after being bombed by Liberators of First Tactical Air Force in June 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Cpl A. F. Nixon (left) and F-Lt R. Taylor (right) of No. 3 Bomb Disposal Unit removing the explosive from Japanese bombs at Noemfoor Island on 10th November 1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Pilots of No. 452 Spitfire Squadron at Halmahera Island in December 1944. Left to right: F-Lt K. D. Cotton, Sqn Ldr L. T. Spence, F-Lts H. V. Freckleton, D. J. Cormack and T. A. Swift.

In January 1945 Air Vice-Marshal Bostock had proposed to Kenney that, for the purposes of the OBOE operations, First Tactical Air Force should be placed under R.A.A.F. Command's direct operational control, and that R.A.A.F. Command should then be given the responsibility for air support requirements of I Australian Corps, which had been assigned to the OBOE operations. So that he could effectively control the air operations, Bostock's plan had included a proposal to move a mobile section of his headquarters from Brisbane to a place near the forward headquarters of the commander of the Australian Land Forces.

Bostock proposed that, when the OBOE operations were completed, First T.A.F. should be again placed under the control of the Thirteenth Air Force for movement to the north, or to the south-west of the Philippines in future offensive operations. "I am particularly anxious," he had said in a letter to Kenney, "that the 1st Tactical Air Force should continue to be employed as a forward offensive formation rather than in a garrison role." Bostock's proposals therefore conformed with the wish of the Australian Government that R.A.A.F. air cover should be available wherever major Australian land forces were in operational areas in contact with the enemy.

Bostock had also proposed that, since the R.A.A.F. would provide Royal New Zealand Air Force units allotted to the Solomon Islands with all fighter control, air-warning facilities, and airfield maintenance, as well as the army cooperation requirements of the II Australian Corps in Bougainville, R.A.A.F. Command should take over operational control in the areas in which the New Zealanders were operating.

General Kenney agreed. After a conference at Leyte with Whitehead, Wurtsmith (now commanding the Thirteenth Air Force), Bostock and Air Vice-Marshal Isitt[6] of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, he assigned operational control of the New Zealand Air Force to Bostock, and told him that he would be responsible for all air operations south of the Philippines.[7] He also told Wurtsmith to support Bostock whenever he needed help, and particularly in land operations in the Netherlands East Indies. Bostock was to designate the targets and coordinate the timing of the American and Australian missions.

Bostock opened an advanced headquarters (ADRAAFCOM) at Morotai on the 15th March. The four senior heads of sections were: Group Captain Candy, Operations; Group Captain Cohen, Intelligence; Group Captain Grant,[8] Administration; and Group Captain Thompson,[9] Signals. The Advanced Headquarters was set up very close to the headquarters of

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[6] AVM Sir Leonard Isitt, KBE, RNZAF. (1915-18: NZ Rifle Bde 1915-16, RAF 1917-19.) RNZAF Rep Ottawa and Washington 1940-41; AOC RNZAF UK 1942-43; CAS RNZAF 1943-46. Regular air force offr; of Wellington, NZ; b. Christchurch, NZ, 27 Jul 1891.

[7] G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, p. 521.

[8] Gp Capt A. G. Grant, OBE, 270313. Comd School of Admin 1941; SAO HQ Northern Area 1941-42, HQ North-Eastern Area 1942-43; SSOA RAAF Cd and OC RAAF Cd Hq 1943-45; SSAO and OC RAAF Cd Adv HQ, Morotai, 1945. Medical student, former regular air force offr; of Brisbane; b. Rockhampton, Qld, 11 Aug 1904.

[9] Gp Capt J. Thompson, 33099 RAF. On exchange duty with RAAF 1942-45; Chief Signals Offr Air HQ RAF Iraq 1941-42; Assistant Chief Signals Offr RAAF Cd HQ 1943-44; Chief Signals Offr Adv RAAF Cd 1945. Regular RAF offr; of Woodside, SA; b. Harrow, Eng, 3 Feb 1913.

the Thirteenth Air Force's Bomber Command, with which it was to work in the planning and carrying out of the Borneo operations. The two headquarters mixed well, and there was "much exchange of whisky and small talk between personnel".

The division of responsibility between Air Vice-Marshals Jones and Bostock continued to hamper the smooth working of the organisation, and during 1944-45 further attempts were made to remedy the situation.

Mr Curtin discussed the problem with General MacArthur in June 1944, and again put forward the view that the only practical manner in which the administrative and operational functions of the R.A.A.F. could be integrated, appeared to be by the appointment of an officer who would be in a senior position to those then held by both Bostock and Jones. MacArthur said that the question was entirely one for the Australian Government, and, if it wished to make such an appointment, he would give the officer his fullest cooperation. The War Cabinet met on the 4th August 1944, and approved the appointment of Air Marshal Sir Keith Park[1] as Chief of the Air Staff.[2] Negotiations were begun through the Australian High Commissioner in London, Mr Bruce, to obtain Park's services. On 30th September, however, MacArthur told Curtin that it was now "too late to make such a change".

In this discussion, MacArthur referred to the difficulties that had existed in relation to the Chief of the Air Staff and the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command, and the concern that the Minister for Air had felt in this regard. General MacArthur said, however, that nothing serious had resulted and he now felt that "any differences that had existed in the past were now quiet". The strategical scope of the war had gone so far forward that an entirely different situation had developed. He considered it no longer necessary to bring a senior R.A.F. officer to Australia. Had the change taken place when it was first mooted, he said, advantage would have accrued, but he now considered it too late to make such a change.

The extent to which the differences were now "quiet", as General MacArthur affirmed, may be gauged by an exchange of signals some months later.

A signal (No. A.452) from R.A.A.F. Headquarters to the A.O.C. R.A.A.F. Command, on 19th January 1945, concerning an air staff policy directive contained the following phrases:

> I take strong exception to the insubordinate tone of your signal and your repeated attempts to usurp authority of this Headquarters. Communications couched in terms such as the one under reply are to cease forthwith.

To which the following reply went back next day to R.A.A.F. Headquarters, from Air Vice-Marshal Bostock:

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[1] Air Chief Marshal Sir Keith Park, GCB, KBE, MC, DFC; RAF. (1914-17: NZ and Royal Fd Arty; 1917-18: RAF.) AOC 11 Gp Fighter Cd 1940, RAF Medit and Malta 1942-43; AOC-in-C Middle East 1944; Allied C-in-C SE Asia 1945-46. Regular air force offr; of Auckland, NZ; b. Thames, NZ, 15 Jun 1892.

[2] War Cabinet Minute No. 3693.

Secret, for C.A.S. from A.O.C. I also have responsibilities. You do not understand current Allied air and R.A.A.F. Higher Organisation in accordance with which I am responsible to Commander, Allied Air Forces, and not, repeat not, subordinate to you for the discharge of the duties incumbent upon my appointment. I do, and will continue to take the strongest exception to your unwarranted and uninformed interference.

Without going into the merits of the question at issue in this exchange of signals, the conclusion that a difficult situation existed is inescapable. A few days later, Mr Drakeford made a further attempt to bring about organisational changes. He wrote to Mr Curtin on the 7th February, recommending that R.A.A.F. Command should move to New Guinea (or other forward base, as operational necessity might require) and take over command of all R.A.A.F. formations in that and the more advanced areas. Bostock would, in these circumstances, be vested with operational and administrative control of all R.A.A.F. formations in the South-West Pacific Area outside the mainland of Australia. Operational units remaining in Australia (except those in the Darwin area) would return to the control of R.A.A.F. Headquarters.

On 27th February Curtin incorporated Drakeford's proposal in a letter to MacArthur which mainly concerned the employment of I Australian Corps and, in particular, the unwillingness of G.H.Q. to allow General Blamey to exert direct operational control of I Australian Corps in the coming operations.

A similar question of principle relating to operational control and command of the R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific Area has also arisen (wrote Curtin). You will recall from earlier discussions, that the arrangement for operational control by the R.A.A.F. Command and administrative control by the R.A.A.F. Headquarters has never worked satisfactorily. The suggestion for the appointment of Air Marshal Sir Keith Park, now Commander, Allied Air Forces, South-East Asia Area, as Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. with operational responsibility to the Commander, Allied Air Forces, South-West Pacific Area, which was originally endorsed by you was later abandoned on your advice.

As a result of the advance in recent months, Allied Air Headquarters has moved far from Australia, but the R.A.A.F. Command is still in Brisbane. R.A.A.F. representation on the operational sections of Allied Air Headquarters consists of a small number of lower ranking officers only, and the control of the First Tactical Air Force, R.A.A.F. (our main striking force in the South-West Pacific Area), passed first to the United States 5th Air Force and later to the 13th Air Force.

In order to ensure that the R.A.A.F. takes its rightful place in operations in the South-West Pacific Area, and to provide the necessary measure of cooperation and control of our field formations and units with Allied Air Headquarters, the Minister for Air has recommended to me that R.A.A.F. Command should move to New Guinea (or other forward base, as operational necessity may require) and take over command of all R.A.A.F. formations in that and the more advanced areas. In such event, the Air Officer Commanding, R.A.A.F. Command, would be vested with operational and administrative control of all R.A.A.F. formations in the South-West Pacific Area, outside the mainland of Australia, being responsible to Allied Air Headquarters for operational control and to R.A.A.F. Headquarters for command and administrative matters.

The adoption of such a course would also enable the units on the mainland to be placed under the operational control of R.A.A.F. Headquarters, subject to operational responsibility to the Commander, Allied Air Forces. I shall therefore

be glad to have your observations on the recommendations of the Minister for Air, in so far as your responsibilities as Commander-in-Chief of the South-West Pacific Area are concerned.

Bostock strongly criticised this proposal, which he described as having been based on "unsound service advice". Bostock sent a teleprinter message to Sir Frederick Shedden (the Secretary of the Defence Department), referring to the forthcoming operations in Borneo and warning: "To attempt to implement higher organisational changes at this late date, and in the face of imminent major offensive operations, would, I believe, seriously jeopardise success. The time factor alone is such that this reorganisation could not be implemented without chaotic confusion and the higher command of air forces supporting the A.I.F. in the MONTCLAIR operations may well be inefficient to a degree which may cause unnecessary casualties and even result in defeat."

He asked that he should be called to Canberra to state his views. Curtin declined to see him, but arranged for him to be co-opted to a meeting of the Defence Committee on 6th March at Victoria Barracks in Melbourne. Meanwhile, on 5th March, MacArthur had written a reply to Curtin's letter of 27th February. In the course of it he said, simply:

With reference to the R.A.A.F. Command, it is desired to have that headquarters move forward to the operational area, but the fact that the major portion of the administrative personnel in the headquarters is composed of W.A.A.A.F's who under current policy are forbidden to leave Australia has up to the present precluded the forward movement of the headquarters. It is hoped that the necessary administrative arrangements can be made in order to permit Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to move his headquarters to a location from which he can effectively command the R.A.A.F. in combat.

I shall comment later upon the subject of transferring to R.A.A.F. Headquarters operational control of those elements of the R.A.A.F. Command that are stationed in Australia as soon as I can discuss the matter with General Kenney.

On 6th March the Defence Committee, with Bostock present,[3] agreed with Bostock that it would be unwise to make changes until the MONTCLAIR operations were completed. It reaffirmed its earlier view that the division between administrative and operational control of the R.A.A.F. should be ended. Its decisions were:

The Defence Committee noted that the Minister's proposals are designed to obviate some of the difficulties that inevitably arise from the separation of operational and administrative responsibility and authority within the R.A.A.F. and considered that, until this separation is ended, no effective solution of the difficulties to which it gives rise will be found. On this point, the Defence Committee reaffirmed its previously expressed opinion that to achieve the maximum efficiency of the R.A.A.F. there should be unified operational and administrative control of the whole R.A.A.F. in the South-West Pacific Area under one command.

Short of the re-integration of the R.A.A.F. under one command, the Defence Committee considered that, pending the completion of the operations to which the R.A.A.F. is now committed in conjunction with the A.M.F., it would not be advisable to introduce any changes in the present organisation, but at the con-

[3] Others present were Adm Sir Guy Royle, Chief of the Naval Staff; Lt-Gen J. Northcott, Chief of the General Staff; AVM Jones, Chief of the Air Staff; and A. J. Wilson, Assistant Secretary, Department of Defence.

clusion of these operations, the question of the operational and administrative control of any R.A.A.F. expeditionary force should be reviewed in the light of the future commitments of that force.

Curtin adopted the Defence Committee's opinion and informed MacArthur of it. On 26th March MacArthur wrote in reply: "I am in entire agreement with the suggestion." Again the question of the reorganisation of the R.A.A.F. was shelved, and it remained so until the war ended.

There was another clash between Air Vice-Marshal Bostock and the Air Board before the end of the war. It arose when General Kenney's Allied Air Headquarters issued an order (No. 2 of 25th April 1945) naming Bostock as "Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, R.A.A.F. Command". The reason for this appeared to be that Bostock had the title of "A.O.C.", yet commanded a number of subordinate A.O.C's. The title "A.O.C-in-Chief" would distinguish him from his subordinates, and this was considered desirable. Bostock promptly passed on details of this order to his subordinate formations. However, R.A.A.F. Headquarters, which had the authority to initiate such administrative matters, did not agree with this change. On 22nd May it signalled to R.A.A.F. Command: "Changes in titles of appointment of Commanders, R.A.A.F. formations, require approval of the Commonwealth Government and cannot be made without such approval. The proposed designation of A.V.M. Bostock as 'Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief' is not approved." This signal was followed, on 20th June, by a letter from the Acting Prime Minister to General MacArthur, asking that Allied Air Forces General Order No. 2 be cancelled. No reply seems to have come from the general.

There can be no doubt that failure to overcome the conflict within the R.A.A.F. had an unsettling effect on the force. The War Cabinet did a disservice to the force by failing to take decisive action. A strong inhibiting factor was the desire to keep on friendly terms with the American commanders. This may explain the failure but does not fully justify it.

The First Tactical Air Force had now grown into a big formation. In March 1945 it contained 13,287 men. It was increased during April and by the end of the month was 16,894 strong, including 1,838 officers and aircrew and 15,056 airmen.

With the R.A.A.F. and the troops of the I Australian Corps crowding on to Morotai in preparation for the Borneo operations, this small island of the Moluccas (of which only the southern part was in the hands of the Allies) was an important hub of Allied activity south of the Philippines, and was one of the largest bases in the South-West Pacific Area. Camping space within the perimeter was very restricted, and to the consternation of the American defenders, Australian troops, staging at Morotai for the Borneo campaign, left the perimeter and pitched their tents in what was regarded by the garrison as enemy-held territory.

A new attack wing, No. 86, commanded by Group Captain Whyte, had been assigned to First T.A.F. for the Borneo operations. The headquarters of this unit, together with the ground echelons of its two squadrons (No.

1, armed with Mosquito aircraft, and No. 93, armed with Beaufighters), arrived during March and April. No. 83 Army Cooperation Wing which was to work with I Australian Corps in Borneo also arrived at Morotai, together with No. 4 (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which was equipped with Boomerangs and Wirraways. The commanding officer of the wing was Group Captain Fleming.[4] In common with other formations, the wing had experienced great difficulty in its movement forward. It had to travel from Lae, in New Guinea, to Morotai, and it had to be on time because one of its units was assigned to a task in the initial assault on Tarakan.

Most of the airmen lived in tents raised far enough from the ground to allow erect walking and, at night, slept on a stretcher under a mosquito net, but sometimes, on first arrival at Morotai, conditions were primitive, and men had to sleep out in the rain and mud without tents. Harassed staff officers worked until after midnight trying to sort out the tangle, and produce tentage and equipment for the men arriving for the Borneo operations. Only a week's notice was received at First Tactical Air Force that between 500 and 600 men of the Australian Liberator squadrons from Darwin would be coming to the island, and there were no tents for them. At one time, No. 78 Wing had 700 men sleeping out in the open, and its commander, Group Captain Arthur, protested vigorously.

Apart from such frustrations and difficulties, conditions at Morotai were not unpleasant, although the camps of First T.A.F. on Morotai were some two degrees north of the equator and the temperature and humidity were high. The rainfall averaged 150 inches a year, and, during February and the first three weeks of March, rain fell in torrents, turning the roads into quagmires and camp sites into "mud heaps".

Access roads between First T.A.F. Headquarters and its units were poor; men and vehicles had to plough through a sea of mud. The journey between First T.A.F. Headquarters and the advanced headquarters of R.A.A.F. Command took an hour, sometimes longer, because of the poor state of roads. This situation would have been improved had R.A.A.F. heavy vehicles been at Morotai earlier, but there was little shipping space available for this transport.

Hewn from a coconut grove, the Pitu and Wama airfields were the scene of much activity. American and Australian aircraft, including Liberators, Mitchells, Catalinas, Beaufighters, Kittyhawks, Spitfires, Lightnings and Black Widows, were busily taking off and landing in their daily strikes against Celebes, the Philippines, Borneo and Halmahera. Douglas transports (Dakotas) of the American air forces and No. 34 Squadron of the R.A.A.F. (which had been assigned to First T.A.F. for transport duties), were also landing and taking off in an almost ceaseless procession, not only during the day, but most of the night. Operations personnel at Wama airfield would handle as many as 400 aircraft a day, and at times aircraft would be landing at the rate of one every fifteen seconds. No. 60

[4] Gp Capt J. R. Fleming, 35. 50 Sqn RAF; SO Orgn, Flying Training Cd RAF 1940-41; comd RAAF Stn, Pearce, 1941, 4 SFTS 1942, RAAF Stn, Laverton, 1942-43; Asst Comdt RAAF Staff School 1943-45; comd 83 Wing 1945. Regular air force offr; of Camberwell, Vic; b. Rockvale, NSW, 11 Aug 1905.

Operational Base Unit, at Morotai, was assigned to control Wama airfield at short notice, but the unit had great difficulty in taking over because of the shortage of flying-control personnel. It was a new experience for the R.A.A.F. to handle an airfield like Wama, because back in Australia the R.A.A.F. controlled airfields which had comparatively few aircraft operating from them. A transport plane had to be sent to Noemfoor, to pick up flying-control personnel from No. 47 Operational Base Unit before it was possible for No. 60 Operational Base Unit to begin duty at Wama.

As well as having the usual motley collection of Liberty ships, LST's, and LCI's, which during every hour of the day were engaged in loading and disgorging their cargoes, the deep water of the bay harboured PT boats, air-sea rescue launches, crash boats, "ducks"[5] and other small craft, which, each busy about their allotted tasks, added something of a regatta atmosphere to the activities of war. A few miles away, beyond the perimeter, Japanese forces were still at large. The 93rd American Division was employed on the perimeter to prevent any attacks on Allied forces and installations, but its activities were limited to patrolling and there were only occasional brushes with the enemy.

Until I Australian Corps became established on Morotai, the R.A.A.F. drew its food from the Americans, including such delicacies as fruit salads, tomato juice and sweet corn. The standard of the American rations was regarded by the men as being good, although there were shortages of fresh meat. There were more complaints when the R.A.A.F. began to draw rations from the Australian Army.

They found the Australian fare monotonous and there was frequently a shortage of fresh bread and meat. There were sharp contrasts back at Noemfoor; units of No. 81 Wing, which were still drawing American rations in March, were receiving fresh eggs, butter and pork, of which there were ample supplies available. Beer, chocolates and cigarettes were in stock at the canteens in Morotai in April, together with Comforts Fund supplies.

Air Commodore Cobby had found it necessary to suspend the replacement of airmen in his command. Normally, a tour of duty in the tropics was fifteen months and those who had served that period, and many more who had been in the tropics for periods up to twenty months, had to remain with their units. This action was necessary because of inability to get replacements up from the south, mainly for lack of transport. The coming operations in Borneo would make heavy demands on his men, and if he could not get men up from the south it was obvious that he would not be able to relieve those whose tours of duty had expired.

To keep up the men's spirits units maintained programs of sport and recreation. A sports competition of both Rugby and Australian Rules football aroused considerable interest. Squadrons also had their men playing basketball and cricket matches, and organised frequent swimming parades. Cobby did his best to encourage such activities.

[5] A 2½-ton amphibious truck used for short runs between ships and the shore. The name was adapted from the equipment lettering DUKW.

There were minor irritations at Morotai. They stemmed from a variety of sources. A not uncommon report at this period appeared under the signature of the commanding officer of No. 79 Squadron in April. He said:

> During the month of April this squadron has passed through a very difficult period in functioning and carrying out the operational commitments of a fighter squadron . . . essential equipment is still, and has been, deficient for the past eight weeks . . . squadron strength is still approximately fifty bodies down . . . strip [airfield] personnel were required for loading parties which seriously hindered adequate maintenance on aircraft . . . a large proportion of the newly arrived personnel lacked squadron training . . . discipline consequently suffered as the squadron was divided up . . . a report on the difficulties in which 79 Squadron has had to operate has been submitted to 80 (F) Wing headquarters on two occasions . . . too much has been expected from this squadron with its deficiencies in equipment and personnel. . . .

The Australian Army and the Thirteenth Air Force produced daily newspapers which were available to men of First T.A.F. There was a radio station on the island, broadcasting the news, and Intelligence officers occasionally gave talks on current events.

Optimism about the outcome of the war was at its peak at the end of April, by which time the Philippines campaign had ended, Okinawa had been invaded, and it had become apparent that Germany must surrender. There had been an increase in enrolments in correspondence courses, indicating that the men were thinking of their prospects in civil occupations after the war. The R.A.A.F. educational services at Morotai had begun classes in subjects such as English, mathematics and languages; but activities generally in education had been handicapped by the acute shortage of good books.

Long absence from areas of civilisation was one of the main factors that made life at Morotai tedious. In Europe, or the Middle East theatres of war, there were generally congenial towns not far away. But on the islands of the Pacific the men had only what amenities they could bring with them. The nostalgia for the sight and companionship of white women was profound. In Europe an Australian airman could be relaxing in London within a few hours of completing a sortie over Germany. At Morotai, he came back from a strike on Halmahera to canvas tents, mud, bully beef, and little else. Parties were occasionally arranged at messes on the islands to which army nursing sisters sometimes came, but this was a rarity, as one may gather from a facetious entry in a squadron history sheet written at Noemfoor, which reported that, at a party given at the mess "only dashing F-Lt —— arrived with a lady".

Compared with the early stages of the New Guinea campaigns of the R.A.A.F., the incidence of malaria at Morotai was negligible. In March, there was slightly less than one case per 1,000 men per month in the whole of First T.A.F. command. The defeat of this scourge of the swamp and jungle was one of the great triumphs of organisation and medical skill in the Pacific war. There were five main factors in its defeat: (*a*) Atebrin—a drug which the men were obliged to take regularly in

tablet form; (*b*) clothing discipline—airmen had to wear gaiters and shirts with sleeves rolled down at night and use nets when sleeping; (*c*) D.D.T. —this potent insecticide was sprayed from aircraft in areas where men were camped or operating; (*d*) Malarial control units—whose men penetrated gulleys and swampy ground, spraying with oil and D.D.T. to kill the mosquitoes both in their adult and larval stages; (*e*) Spraying of tents and messes with D.D.T. There were occasional outbreaks of dysentery and gastro-enteritis, but skin complaints caused most trouble.

Bottled beer was available in small quantities to the men at Morotai and Noemfoor, and officers, in addition, received issues of spirits. It had become a common practice among many of those who received beer to sell it for money, or exchange it for cigarettes and other articles such as fountain pens and watches. At one time there were on Noemfoor Island 70,000 American servicemen and about 6,000 to 7,000 R.A.A.F. personnel. The Americans had no liquor supplies but much money, and they were eager to buy liquor from the Australians either for cash or by bartering cigarettes. Air Commodore Cobby, in evidence to the Barry Commission, mentioned later, said:

> Most of the fellows wanted their beer badly, but there is always a proportion who do not drink. They were trading it to Americans in a surreptitious way. The Americans would give them on the quiet five cartons of cigarettes, or 25/- for a bottle of beer. These fellows used to trade cigarettes back to their own friends at 2/- a packet. That meant they were getting £5 for 1/3d. If you were entitled to two bottles of beer a week, it meant £10. A lot of people are quite prepared to go without it for £10. That led to other pernicious habits. Some business-minded airmen formed a kind of ring to buy up any liquor they could get and they finally started to get in chaps who normally would have drunk their beer . . . we had to crush that too, which took some little time. . . . On the nights when our beer was issued our camps were invaded by hordes of Americans.

Cobby took what steps he could to stamp out this trade. He ordered that the tops were to be removed from the bottles before issue to the men. In January 1945 he warned that unless the sales ceased he would stop the issue of beer. The Americans and R.A.A.F. provost marshals conferred about methods of preventing the trade, and a number of airmen were punished for taking part in it. In spite of these measures, however, the practice grew. It became obvious that some of the officers were also engaged in it, and Cobby later had certain officers charged and they appeared before courts-martial.

At the end of 1944 Group Captain Arthur had drawn the attention of Air Commodore Cobby to what he believed were unjustifiable losses of men and material. Acting from a high sense of duty, he was the driving force behind a movement at Morotai to correct what was considered by himself and others in the force, to be a most unsatisfactory situation concerning the flying operations of the squadrons.

After his interview with Cobby, Arthur expected that something would be done to correct an operational policy which he considered was wasteful in men and aircraft. But he was disappointed; and in March and

April the nature of the operations carried out appeared to him to be more wasteful than before.

Arthur was convinced that something must be done. He was not willing to acquiesce in silence, and began to seek a new course of action to correct the defects which he believed to exist. In March he had gone to Morotai to find out whether any other senior officer was willing to make a stand against the type of operations the R.A.A.F. was carrying out. He was prepared to sacrifice his own career in an attempt to achieve his purpose.

At Morotai, Arthur sought out senior officers who thought as he did, including Group Captain Caldwell, who had already complained of the operations to the Chief of the Air Staff; Wing Commander Gibbes,[6] wing leader of No. 80 Wing; and Wing Commander Ranger,[7] a staff officer on the planning staff for the Borneo operations. Other officers who supported the movement were Squadron Leader J. L. Waddy, commanding officer of No. 80 Squadron; Squadron Leader Grace, commanding officer of No. 82 Squadron; Squadron Leader Vanderfield, and Squadron Leader Harpham.[8] During March and early April these officers met and discussed the problem and all agreed that something should be done. Caldwell suggested that the only method open to them was to resign their commissions.

On 14th April a fairly definite course was decided on. They agreed to resign in a body. The date of the resignation hinged upon Caldwell's return to Australia on leave. He was to sound the Minister for Air and Mr J. P. Abbott, a member of Parliament, and then write to each of the other seven officers informing him of the result, after which each officer would put in a request for termination of his commission.

On 19th April Cobby had on his desk at Command House eight identically-worded applications to resign. They read:

> I hereby respectfully make application that I be permitted to resign my commission as an officer in the Royal Australian Air Force, forthwith.

Cobby asked some of his senior officers if they knew what was behind it; but they were unable to say. He then summoned all the officers concerned (except Caldwell) to his office to find out what the trouble was but all refused to tell him. Cobby later described his efforts to get them to discuss their complaints:

> I saw them individually first and I saw them collectively and asked them what it was about and pointed out that the terms of the application to resign in the first place could not receive any support from me in any way as they were not submitted in the terms of orders. It is laid down that there must be some reason for wishing to resign your commission or leaving the service.
>
> However, they said, "We wish them to stay" and they wanted them to stand. I asked them if there was some row on somewhere which I could fix up, as they were all good officers personally known to me and in my opinion quite good fellows

[6] W Cdr R. H. M. Gibbes, DSO, DFC, 260714. 450 Sqn; comd 3 Sqn 1942-43, 80 Wing 1944-45. Salesman; of Manly, NSW; b. Balgowlah, NSW, 6 May 1916.

[7] Gp Capt K. Ranger, 250300. Comd 12 EFTS 1941-42, 8 EFTS 1942; No. 9 Ops Gp 1942-43: SOA 5 Gp 1944-45, 1 TAF 1945. Of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Melbourne, 11 Sep 1913.

[8] Sqn Ldr S. R. Harpham, 252148. Comd 60 OBU 1944-45. Stock agent; of Tatura, Vic; b. 3 Jan 1907.

and fellows of quite good sense and fellows that I have seen quite a lot of over the period that I was in command and they said that they preferred not to answer. . . . I said: "Is this something against me, or having a go against me in this, because if so, if you feel that I have fallen down in my job, I will straight away ask to be recalled," and they said, "It has nothing to do with you."

Cobby decided that he must inform Bostock that Arthur and other officers had put in their resignations. Bostock asked permission to see them. Cobby agreed and Bostock, on his arrival at First T.A.F. Headquarters, asked the officers if they would reconsider the matter. He asked them to take up the applications which he put down in front of them on a table and tear them up. If they did so, nothing further would be heard of the affair, he said; but they all refused. However, on Bostock's request, they agreed to change the word "forthwith" to "at the end of current operations". This would make clear their intention not to prejudice the course of the R.A.A.F's operations against Borneo.

It was apparent to Bostock that there was much dissatisfaction in First T.A.F. and he made up his mind to seek a drastic remedy. On 22nd April, after his meeting with the seven officers, he sent a signal to Air Force Headquarters reporting that morale in First T.A.F. was at a "dangerously low level", and recommending the transfer of Cobby, Simms[9] and Group Captain Gibson from their posts. In the course of the long signal he said:

Seven officers, including one commander of a wing, two squadron commanders and one wing leader have submitted applications for permission to resign their commissions. These applications all bear the same date and are identically worded. Applications offer no reasons for resignations. In presence of A.O.C. 1st T.A.F. I interviewed the seven officers concerned and failed to obtain any explanation of their actions. Demeanour of all officers during my interview with them was respectful but bitter and unrelenting. . . . The A.O.C. T.A.F. must accept responsibility for the state of his command and this inescapable principle is fully recognised by Cobby with whom I have had the fullest and frankest discussion from which it is clear that he has been badly served by his senior staff. I must therefore request that Cobby be relieved immediately of his appointment and that similar action be taken concerning Gibson and Simms. Cobby has seen this signal. I urgently request that Scherger be appointed forthwith to relieve Cobby and that Scherger should arrive at Morotai in time to accompany the assault force which sails from Morotai on the 27th April. . . . I have discussed the whole situation with General Morshead who is vitally concerned as 1st T.A.F. is providing air component of his task force. General Morshead concurs with my views generally and advises me that the action I am now taking is the only possible course.

Cobby denied that the morale of the force was low. He added that there might be discontent, which was understandable, but it was not discontent which affected morale in the proper understanding of the word "morale". However, the signal went to Air Force Headquarters and Air Vice-Marshal Jones flew immediately from Melbourne to investigate. General Kenney came down to Morotai from his Manila headquarters for a conference with Generals Blamey and Morshead and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock con-

[9] Gp Capt R. H. Simms, AFC, 31. SASO HQ Southern Area 1941-42, HQ Eastern Area 1942-43; HQ North-Western Area 1943-45, 1 TAF 1945. Regular air force offr; of Melbourne; b. Ireland, 14 Aug 1906.

cerning air support for the Tarakan operation, and, learning of the trouble at First T.A.F., had asked to see the seven officers. The meeting took place at Bostock's headquarters and Jones attended it.

According to the evidence before Commissioner Barry, the general began the discussion by referring to the applications to resign and then said that many times in a war people were dissatisfied and felt that they were wasting their time. He had many units in back areas doing garrison duties, and they were very fed up with their role; in some cases he was frightened to go near them, but at the same time they had to be there and had to be doing the job, and all he could do was to relieve them as soon as he possibly could. He asked the officers not on any account to "throw in your badges", but they all refused.

The immediate upshot of the incident was that Air Vice-Marshal Jones gave instructions that Group Captains Gibson and Simms were to be withdrawn from their appointments and that Air Commodore Cobby should be relieved. On his return to Melbourne he recommended to the Minister for Air that an enquiry should be made by a judge or a commissioner. The Minister agreed and appointed Mr John Vincent Barry, K.C., as a commissioner. Jones considered an enquiry essential mainly on account of allegations relating to trade in liquor. The terms of reference of the commission stressed the liquor question above the more significant issue of the operational activities of First T.A.F. and the causes of discontent at Morotai.

Barry, after examination of witnesses and documents over many weeks, came to the conclusion that

> from about the beginning of January 1945 there was a widespread condition of discontent and dissatisfaction within 1st T.A.F. at Morotai. The two main factors which brought about that condition were the opinions generally held about the nature of the operational activities upon which the wings were engaged and the attitude of the senior staff officers, Group Captain Simms and Group Captain Gibson. As that widespread condition developed and existed without his being aware of it the A.O.C. 1st T.A.F. failed to maintain proper control over his command.

Barry found that expenditure on the operations described by certain unit commanders far exceeded the material damage inflicted on the enemy and that, from that standpoint, they were wasteful; and this was supported by a report by the R.A.A.F's Operational Research Section describing similar operations. This report said:

> The results achieved hardly appear to provide a reasonable return for the effort expended. . . . These operations indicate the wastefulness inherent in the tactical employment of air forces . . . against small pockets of the enemy . . . in this theatre.

It is interesting to note also that Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, writing from Brisbane to the Air Officer Commanding, Western Area, on 28th May 1945, made these observations:

> I notice that in your remarks relating to all squadrons you lay stress on the number of flying hours per squadron for the month as an index of the value of the

work performed. I feel that this is a dangerous practice since the mere piling up of flying time does not necessarily indicate the value of air operations completed, or even the usefulness of war training exercises. Furthermore, recent experiences in 1st Tactical Air Force, make it quite clear that the morale of aircrew and ground personnel of squadrons may become seriously affected if the impression is gained that unnecessary flying is ordered for the primary purpose of enabling the Area Headquarters to report figures which compare favourably with squadrons in other commands and without proper regard for the operational or war training value achieved. The principle must be adopted that flying must only be ordered to meet operational commitments and to maintain squadrons at a high state of operational efficiency. Effective conduct of operations and not the building up of flying times is the true index of efficiency.

The conflict of opinion as to the operational effort required to end the war against Japan was not by any means confined to First Tactical Air Force. In fact the debate went on at the highest levels. President Roosevelt was afraid that it might cost the lives of another million Americans before Japan capitulated. Some of the senior strategists believed that it would be necessary to invade Japan, others that it was only necessary to continue a strategic bomber offensive to force the enemy to capitulate.

As for the by-passed areas where the Australians were engaged in 1945, General MacArthur, reporting to the Army Chief of Staff, said:

The enemy garrisons which have been by-passed in the Solomons and New Guinea, represent no menace to current or future operations. Their capacity for organised offensive effort has passed. The various processes of attrition will eventually account for their final disposition. The actual time of their destruction is of little or no importance, and their influence as a contributing factor to the war is already negligible. The actual process of their immediate destruction by assault methods would unquestionably involve heavy loss of life without adequate compensating strategic advantages.

When MacArthur wrote that the influence of these forces was "negligible" he seems to have forgotten that, until the fourth quarter of 1944, these Japanese forces were immobilising six American divisions which were engaged in protecting bases in areas otherwise occupied by the enemy; and that, since then, four Australian divisions had been similarly employed.

General Blamey pointed this out. He said that the 90,000 "fanatical Japanese" in the New Guinea territories (actually there were far more) would fight to the death and he emphasised that large bodies of troops were essential to contain them until their destruction was determined upon.

Australian operations in the by-passed areas were criticised in the Australian Press and Parliament, and by the troops themselves; and later the War Cabinet called on General Blamey to explain his conduct of the operations. He wrote that his object was:

To conduct operations against the enemy with a view to:

(*a*) destroying the enemy where this can be done with relatively light casualties, and so to free our territory and liberate the native population and thereby progressively reduce our commitments and free personnel from the Army;

(*b*) where conditions are not favourable for the destruction of the enemy, to contain him in a restricted area by the use of a much smaller force, thus following the principle of economy.

Blamey said that to commit any troops, and particularly Australians, to a passive role of defence was quickly to destroy their morale, create discontent and decrease resistance to sickness. The enemy would continue his domination of the natives and the prestige of the Australian nation would be lowered throughout the world.

At a discussion in the Advisory War Council on 6th June, Mr Spender and Sir Earle Page both criticised General Blamey's appreciation. Sir Earle Page said that he was not prepared to take any responsibility for the operations that were being conducted in the three areas. Spender said that in some respects the reasoning in the appreciation was "inconsistent and illogical" and that on "no occasion had he concurred in the use to which the Australian forces were being put".

The Japanese themselves in Bougainville were surprised that the Australians began operations against them, because they believed that their troops in these areas were strategically impotent. When they learned that Australian troops had replaced American troops at Torokina they took the view that their situation in Bougainville was becoming "grave".

The American leaders had been content, when moving through the Solomons and New Guinea, to seize a beach-head, develop airfields and then move on to another objective, leaving strong forces behind to garrison their bases. They had no intention to destroy the Japanese forces in the islands piecemeal but merely to contain them and develop bases from which to leap farther ahead towards Japan. This policy saved lives, but, as mentioned, it tied up large forces on garrison duties: so large, indeed, that MacArthur was unable to assemble a strong enough force to attack the Philippines until Australian divisions had relieved his New Guinea garrisons.

During the operations in the Philippines, however, the policy of G.H.Q. was changed. MacArthur said that the idea of by-passing the Philippines "was not only unsound strategically but basically immoral, because it would abandon all the American prisoners that the Japs held in the Philippines and seventeen million Filipinos to the enemy".[1] He was echoed by General Kenney who said that "if we blockaded them and left half a million or so Japs in their country to steal their food and subject them to misery and starvation, I felt we would not be keeping faith with them".[2] Thus in regard to the liberation of the Philippines, the American leaders employed the same policy as Blamey's in New Guinea, and used one of the same arguments to explain it.

The natives in Japanese-occupied areas were often in a lamentable state. Round Wewak and in Bougainville, the Japanese, now cut off from their homeland, had dispossessed the natives and taken their food, leaving them to starve.

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[1] *General Kenney Reports*, p. 377.
[2] Kenney, p. 371.

The Native War Damage Compensation Committee[3] reported that "in Bougainville those [natives] brought into our lines are literally skin and bone". The report claimed that "one quarter of the population of Bougainville may have perished. . . . The invasion and war activities . . . have had effects upon the natives so calamitous and so far removed from anything with which their experience and way of life have made them familiar, that it is beyond their power to cope with them."

As for First Tactical Air Force, Cobby, before the Barry Commission, defended his conduct of operations from Morotai and denied that those operations were wasteful. He said that only a minimum number of planes "consistent with keeping the country neutralised" were in operation. He continued:

> I should like to mention that we were operating at only about one-third of our capacity and that, without straining our resources at all, we could have pushed up our operations threefold . . . this in relation to the allegations or belief, that we needlessly ran up hours. . . . Apparently there was some discontent, but even that was not dangerous. In fact, I felt that it was quite the reverse, that it was a healthy sign of discontent amongst certain officers who wished to do more in the war than they were doing. Unfortunately, it was not within the power of 1st T.A.F. to give them that more important or more interesting work. . . .[4]

In the South-West Pacific in 1944 and 1945, air and land forces had to be committed against the Japanese armies in the "by-passed" territories. Throughout the war the air force in North-Western Area, for example, was largely engaged against enemy bases which it was not intended to attack with land forces. One of the great advantages conferred by effective air and sea power, with its great mobility, is that, by simulating a serious threat, it can tie down large defensive forces.

Opinions differed as to the degree of activity that should have been employed by the forces engaged against the by-passed enemy bases. Indeed, different policies were in fact adopted in different places. In the Australian territories General MacArthur preferred merely to defend his perimeters, but in the southern and central Philippines he preferred to continue the fight until all resistance had been overcome. In Bougainville, and on the New Guinea mainland, General Blamey decided to undertake full-scale offensives, but on New Britain to hold a line well back from the enemy's main defences.

If military operations against enemy forces whom it is intended to contain are limited, air action should usually be intensified, and it was on this principle that the operations of the Thirteenth Air Force and First T.A.F. were decided in 1944 and 1945.

What were the basic causes of the malaise of the First T.A.F. at Morotai? They were not the discomfort of the living conditions. These had been far worse in 1942 when the R.A.A.F. in New Guinea had been in high fettle. They were not the divided control of the Australian Air Force. This had been a subject of irreverent comment in the force for

[3] The members of this committee were J. V. Barry, K.C., chairman, Major I. Hogbin, an anthropologist, and Major J. L. Taylor, of the New Guinea Administration.

[4] Barry Commission, evidence, p. 2,328.

some time without substantially affecting its efficiency. The fundamental cause seems to have been the conviction of a group of young leaders that they were engaging in operations that were not militarily justifiable—a conviction widely shared also by many Australian soldiers and Australian political leaders. It is perhaps significant that several of them had served with distinction in a critical period in the Middle East. After that the operations of 1944 and 1945 were particularly frustrating. The subsequent inquiry made it clear that almost everyone concerned acted from the highest motives, and was convinced that, in the crisis, he acted wisely.

## CHAPTER 27

# TARAKAN

ON the 21st March 1945 General MacArthur's headquarters issued Operations Instruction No. 99, which directed I Australian Corps (General Morshead) with Allied Air Forces in support, to occupy Tarakan Island on 29th April.[1] It was expected that by that time control over the Sulu Archipelago would have been established. The task was defined by a G.H.Q. staff study as follows:

> Destroy hostile garrison and seize Tarakan Island off North-East Borneo; establish air elements for support of subsequent operations against Balikpapan and for protection of convoy route thereto; protect and conserve petroleum producing and processing installations and assist in re-establishment of constituted government in the area.

Tarakan is a pear-shaped island a few miles off the north-east coast of Borneo. Before the war, the oilfields on Tarakan produced 6,000,000 barrels of oil a year, and in Allied hands could become a useful oiling station. Fringed with mangrove swamps and a few sandy beaches, it had an interior of rolling wooded hills. It was Dutch territory, and a small force of Dutch troops were to take part in the operation.

In addition to having a good anchorage for shipping, Tarakan's airfield made it of considerable importance for the operations which were planned to follow. Indeed, to capture the airfield was the main reason for going into Tarakan. It might provide support for the next two operations in Borneo, one to capture Brunei Bay and the other to take Balikpapan on the east coast. That was the plan. It was known, however, that although the eastern half of the airfield had good natural drainage, the western side was swampy. For heavy duty, a considerable amount of




[1] Later changed to 1st May, to take advantage of the tide.

rock work and resurfacing and more drainage was considered necessary. The annual rainfall at Tarakan was 146 inches, and at the season when the landing was to be made, one week's fine weather was highly improbable.

General Kenney delegated the planning and direction of the air side of the operation to Air Vice-Marshal Bostock, and directed him to "cause his representatives to meet with representatives of I Australian Corps, which is charged with the coordination of plans". Bostock had at his disposal for the operation, the First Tactical Air Force, and the Thirteenth and Fifth Air Forces. In addition, heavy-bomber squadrons of the R.A.A.F. based at Darwin and even as far afield as Western Australia were to be used to neutralise enemy bases which were beyond the reach of bombers based in the islands.

R.A.A.F. Command's tasks in the operation were threefold:

1. Neutralise by air attack prior to P-day (assault day) all enemy resources which were potentially capable of interfering with the success of the operation;
2. Support the 26th Australian Infantry Brigade in its operations on Tarakan;
3. Establish air forces at Tarakan as soon as the airstrip there becomes available. These air forces based on Tarakan were then to provide air support for the infantry during the "mopping-up" operations, and prepare to carry out air operations from Tarakan in support of future operations in Borneo.

The Tarakan operation would follow the familiar Allied pattern, by now also well known to the enemy, of isolating the battlefield from enemy support, neutralising hostile air and sea elements within range of the objective area, destroying troop concentrations, and covering the assault with aircraft.[2] Most of the preliminary bombardment would be carried out by the Thirteenth Air Force now under Major-General Wurtsmith. The Fifth Air Force, at this time, was not fully engaged to the north and would provide flights of bombers for pre-assault strikes on Tarakan.

Estimates of enemy strength before the Tarakan assault showed that there were not more than 48 fighters and 21 bombers in the whole of the Netherlands East Indies, and that there was little chance of reinforcements arriving. Japanese naval intervention was highly unlikely, and the hostile troops at Tarakan were estimated at 4,000, of whom only 1,500 were considered to be combatant troops.

It was not possible for the assault forces to achieve surprise because of the effective Japanese radar coverage of the approaches to the Borneo coast. However, this was not regarded as being of importance since the enemy's air intervention was expected to be slight or non-existent owing to his very limited means.

The First Tactical Air Force, as well as attacking targets in the pre-assault stage and providing air cover for convoys en route, was ordered

[2] A Japanese intelligence report outlined Allied invasion methods as follows: "It is generally estimated that the bombing of a landing point by enemy aeroplanes from the first raid generally extends over a period of from one to two months. At the beginning, reconnaissance bombing is carried out. From about twenty days prior to the landing, enemy starts his main bombing by means of numerous aeroplanes. After our military installations and airfields have been thoroughly demolished and our military strength dissipated, neutralisation bombing is further carried out to assist the landing. The landing is begun under cover of aeroplanes." (Japanese Naval General Staff, Intelligence Report, 22 Jul 1944—ATIS translation.)

to establish an air garrison at Tarakan as soon as the airfield there opened. Air Commodore Cobby had appointed Group Captain Arthur, who on 6th April had become commanding officer of No. 78 Wing, to be the Air Task Force Commander at Tarakan. Once the assault was mounted, Cobby would be responsible for all air operations in the area and he could, when necessary, call on the Thirteenth Air Force to provide aircraft for strikes or other air tasks.

Cobby had planned to use No. 81 Wing in the Tarakan operation. This wing had been in the Admiralties and Noemfoor for many months with little to do and he hoped to give them a more active role as soon as possible in Borneo. Unfortunately at the last moment he had to switch No. 78 Wing in place of No. 81 Wing, because No. 81 had been unable to get all its units forward from Noemfoor and Townsville, Queensland. The men of No. 81 Wing were somewhat upset at the change and No. 78 Wing, which had been proceeding in a leisurely manner, was given ten days in which to pack up and work out the details of their move into Tarakan.

In addition to Nos. 75, 78 and 80 Squadrons, No. 452 (Spitfire) Squadron was attached to No. 78 Wing for the Tarakan operation. No. 77 Wing (Wing Commander Read) was also included in the air garrison force; while four Auster aircraft of No. 83 Wing were to be taken along in the assault convoy and unloaded as soon as possible after the landing. It was planned that ground staffs of the squadrons concerned, together with ancillary units such as medical, stores, repair and servicing, fighter control and radar, would be transported by ships, and the squadron pilots would fly their aircraft in as soon as the airfield was ready for use.

Air strikes against airfields in Borneo, Celebes and Java began twenty days before the landing. They were provided by the Thirteenth and Fifth Air Forces as planned and by Liberators of Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons R.A.A.F., which had been transferred from Darwin to Morotai, where they came under the control of First T.A.F. The role of the bombers was long-range attacks against the Borneo-Celebes area, including the destruction of ground forces, oil storage and enemy defences on Tarakan Island. Other Liberators of these squadrons were to act in the role of air observers over the beach-head on assault day and the day after.

Fifteen Liberators of Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons, together with ground maintenance personnel, arrived at Morotai between 8th and 10th April. The remaining aircraft of these squadrons, together with No. 23 Squadron's aircraft, continued operating from the Darwin area.

The Australian Liberators were ordered to carry out operations at a rate of effort of 800 hours per squadron per month for twenty-one days. Air Commodore Charlesworth, the air officer commanding, North-Western Area, doubted whether this rate of effort could be sustained and pointed out that it was far in excess of the normal scale and that poor serviceability was to be expected when the aircraft returned to Darwin. "If the sustained effort is continued as envisaged," he said, "there will be a terrific back-log of maintenance work piled up."

Air operations against Tarakan and near-by targets on the mainland of Borneo, began on the 12th April with a raid by Lightnings of Thirteenth Air Force on gun positions at south Tarakan. The air bombardment of these Borneo targets in preparations for the Tarakan landing was an intensification of the bombardment that had been going on almost continuously since the first raid by American Liberators against Tarakan in November 1944. The frequency of attacks was gradually increased until by April 1945 they had developed into a full-scale air assault by bombers and fighter-bombers which unloaded high-explosive and napalm fire bombs and strafed every target they could find. In the Tarakan area special attention was paid to bulk storage oil tanks which could be used to provide a flow of burning oil into the landing area. All these tanks were destroyed.

During the period 10th-25th April, the Thirteenth Air Force heavy bombers, mediums and fighters flew 570 sorties to deliver 750 tons of bombs on targets in Borneo and Celebes.

The first raid by Liberators of First T.A.F. from Morotai was on the 13th April, when six aircraft from Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons, led by Group Captain Kingwell, attacked personnel areas at Tawao with demolition and fragmentation bombs. Some of the bombs went into the water, but others damaged buildings and jetties. Six fires were seen as the formation of Liberators left the target. Another six Liberators, with different crews, struck at Tawao again on the 15th April, with 75 per cent of their bombs falling on the target. Next day the Australian Liberators began their strikes on Tarakan itself. Nine aircraft raided the Pamusian Tank Farm, destroying three tanks and starting fires. The crews saw a flash of fire rising to 200 feet then subsiding. The Liberators then attacked the Lingkas Tank Farm, scoring direct hits which destroyed two large tanks. Group Captain McLean,[3] who captained one of the aircraft in this operation, had to return to base early because of a fire in one of the Liberator's motors.

On 17th April Squadron Leader I. O. Black led six Liberators into an attack on a barracks area at Tarakan. They dropped forty general-purpose bombs in addition to incendiaries and fragmentation bombs. All fell in the target area, starting fires. On 18th April Tarakan was again the target for six Liberators and hits were scored on the Lingkas Tank Farm. On 20th April five Liberators attacked Manggar airfield at Balikpapan, cratering the runway, and on the following day six more of these aircraft bombed Sepinggang storage area at Balikpapan, causing fires.

While the Liberators of Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons, operating from Morotai, concentrated on Borneo targets, other Australian Liberators of No. 25 Squadron (based in Western Australia) and No. 23 Squadron (based in the Darwin area) were raiding Java and other targets in the Netherlands East Indies. No. 25 Squadron lost its first aircraft over enemy territory on 26th April when eight Liberators from this squadron, staging

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[3] Gp Capt D. McLean, 78. Comd RAAF Stn Pearce 1942-43, RAAF Stn Laverton 1943-44, 21 Sqn and 82 Wing 1945. Regular air force offr; of Piangil, Vic; b. Charlton, Vic, 29 Jul 1913. Killed in action 1 Jul 1945.

through Corunna Downs, set off to attack Malang airfield near Surabaya to put it out of commission during the operation against Tarakan. Squadron Leader Dennett[4] led the eight Liberators which took off at five-minute intervals. The weather was bad over Java as well as over the alternate target, and although some of the Liberators bombed, results could not be observed because of cloud. The fifth aircraft in the mission captained by Squadron Leader Wawn[5] sent out distress signals. Wawn called for a bearing and said he was then making for Truscott airfield. Off Sumba, Wawn informed base that he would have to land. He did so successfully but unfortunately all of the crew were captured almost immediately by Japanese soldiers and taken first to Sumbawa, later to Lombok and Bali and eventually to Batavia, where they arrived towards the end of June 1945. During their imprisonment the men, particularly Wawn, received brutal treatment, being beaten and tortured by Japanese interrogators. All members of the crew survived, however, and were released at Batavia at the end of the war.

Up to the day of the landing on 1st May, the Liberators from Darwin and Cunderdin continued to harass and bomb enemy airfields within range, particularly Malang, Den Pasar, Bingkalapa, Kendari and Ambesia. Others carried out shipping searches to blockade Macassar Strait and Celebes, Arafura, Timor, Banda and Flores Seas.

Meanwhile, the Thirteenth and Fifth Air Forces had been carrying the major burden of the pre-invasion phase of the operation. Altogether, attacks were made on Kuching, Miri, Labuan, Jesselton, Ranau, Kudat, Sandakan, Tawao, Tarakan, Sadau Island, Samarinda, Manggar, Sepinggang, Balikpapan (Borneo); Jolo (Sulu Archipelago); Tanamon, Langoan, Gorontalo, Malimpung (Celebes); and Surabaya.

The Beaufighters took part in an attack on anti-aircraft positions at Tarakan on 20th April. Six of them, from No. 31 Squadron, were assigned to suppress anti-aircraft fire while an American Mitchell took photographs, at low level, along the Tarakan waterfront. The aircraft staged in overnight at Zamboanga. Next day, two of the Beaufighters were prevented from taking part because of mechanical troubles but the remaining four swept through the area and effectively restrained the enemy anti-aircraft guns. Some excellent photographs were taken by the crew of the Mitchell.

In the period from 20th to 28th April, only seven enemy aircraft were sighted over Borneo by Allied aircraft, and with one exception they were unaggressive, but in Celebes the enemy made seven interceptions and in one case an enemy fighter collided with an American Liberator which was on an armed shipping search of Macassar Strait. Both aircraft were destroyed.

As assault day approached, attacks were made on targets at Tarakan which might impede the ground troops. The priorities for attacks on these targets were (*a*) anti-aircraft positions; (*b*) supply dumps; (*c*) buildings

[4] W Cdr J. E. S. Dennett, 260709. 31 Sqn; comd 25 and 102 Sqns 1945. Clerk; of Lindfield, NSW; b. Chelmer, Qld, 15 Oct 1916.

[5] Sqn Ldr J. A. Wawn, AFC, 261720. RAAF Pacific Ferry Unit, 25 Sqn. Airline pilot; of Shoreham, Eng; b. Sydney, 28 Feb 1916.

capable of being used for military purposes; (*d*) warehouses; (*e*) possible coastal defence gun positions; and (*f*) oil storage installations. During the 28th and 29th April, shore defences, supply and personnel areas on Tarakan were bombed by 29 Mitchells and 11 Lightnings.

While the air forces continued their bombardment, intensive preparations were being made to prepare and load the assault convoy at Morotai. First T.A.F. units assigned to the operation prepared for it in an atmosphere of doubt and confusion. Nerves were frayed from long hours of work. There had been a lot of strain over the liquor episode and this had been followed by the attempted resignations of senior officers engaged in the operations. Just as First T.A.F. units were moving aboard ship, General Headquarters changed the sequence of the OBOE operations. It was announced that OBOE 6 had been interposed immediately after OBOE 1 instead of OBOE 2 (Balikpapan). First T.A.F. was the air task force for OBOE 6 and shipping, loadings and the air plan had to be recast at the last minute. A bare few days before he boarded the command ship *Rocky Mount,* Air Commodore Cobby knew that Air Vice-Marshal Bostock had recommended to Air Force Headquarters that not only he but also his senior operations and administrative officers should be withdrawn from the command.

Amid this confusion the squadrons packed up their equipment, returning surplus gear to dumps and destroying old files and maps. Emphasis was given to mobility. Equipment was mobile-loaded on to the vessels which would transport them to Tarakan. Vehicles had to be spray-painted and completely water-proofed so that they could be partially submerged in salt water and remain serviceable. The equipment of one of the units assigned to Tarakan (No. 114 Mobile Fighter Control Unit) did not arrive at Morotai from the mainland until the day the convoy was to sail. Moreover it had been packed low in the ship with the equipment of a repair and servicing unit on top of it.

Advanced Headquarters of First T.A.F. embarked on the 23rd April, Cobby going aboard the command ship on 26th April, and, at about 4 p.m. that day, the convoy of sixty-nine vessels, escorted by warships and with air cover aloft, left Morotai for Tarakan. The air cover on the first afternoon was satisfactory, but no dusk cover was provided. It was apparent that the Australian pilots engaged in convoy escort had been given insufficient briefing on communications and codes. Convoy cover was provided most of next day, but the timing of arrivals and reliefs was poor. However, the cover given by the Thirteenth Air Force, which took over this commitment, west of the 123rd meridian to Tarakan, was satisfactory.

Meanwhile, the operation had opened on 30th April with an unopposed landing by a small force on Sadau Island, north-west of Lingkas, to provide positions from which artillery could support the main assault next day. At the same time the Australian engineers entered Lingkas harbour to blast holes out of the underwater barrier. The engineers carried out their mission without loss, in spite of the fact that one of the smoke screens put

down by aircraft to obscure them from the shore was laid to seaward of them, as a result of which they were silhouetted against a white background until the smoke drifted inshore.

The landing was preceded by a four-day naval bombardment, and, on P-day, Mitchells, Liberators and Lightnings of the Thirteenth Air Force bombed and strafed the landing area. The landing was carried out near Lingkas on 1st May against light opposition, which consisted mainly of machine-gun and mortar fire. Casualties were small.

Australian Liberators had been scheduled to make strikes on assault day, but failed to carry out the missions. Bostock was informed that they did not carry out their commitments because they had completed the allotted number of flying hours on which maintenance was based. This failure was severely criticised by Bostock who said later:

> In my opinion, it is inexcusable to allow consideration of routine maintenance procedure of this nature to preclude the employment of aeroplanes in operations in support of an assault on a beach-head.[6]

On 2nd May a Liberator of the R.A.A.F. detailed for air observation duties over Tarakan failed to show up for the same reason. "Such inflexibility of effort," stated the R.A.A.F. Command report on the operation, "is intolerable, and could have caused acute operational embarrassment had enemy ground opposition been more severe. Operations were resumed after inquiry into the cause of failure."

The 26th Brigade (of the 9th Australian Division) supported by one company of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, quickly secured the beach-head and the jetties. There was no opposition on the beach, the enemy having withdrawn inland. Nor did the enemy air force make an appearance during the landing. This total lack of air reaction confirmed the belief that Japanese air power in the Netherlands East Indies was a spent force. Allied superiority in the air was such that a Thirteenth Air Force Mitchell was able to fly up and down the beach landing area spraying it with a solution of D.D.T. as an anti-malarial precaution for the troops that were coming ashore.

The R.A.A.F. was in trouble at Tarakan from the start. Because of the faulty loading there was considerable confusion and delay during and after the landing of the ground parties. Air-warning facilities which were to give warning of the approach of enemy aircraft, took thirty-four hours to erect and bring into operation. Relatively unessential equipment was unloaded from the landing vessels well in advance of the radar equipment. The base plate of the ground-control interception station was loaded in a different vessel from the rest of the station.

Within an hour of landing, the 2/48th Battalion struck slight opposition, while stiff resistance held up the 2/23rd Battalion on a ridge, which, however, was captured next day. Going was difficult in the airfield area because of the terrain, enemy resistance, and land mines which had been sown in great numbers. Tarakan township was occupied after two days'

[6] RAAF Command Report, OBOE 1, p. 2.

heavy fighting, and on the 5th a patrol of the 2/24th Battalion reported that the enemy had abandoned the airfield. Work was begun immediately to clear the airfield of bombs and mines.

Four Auster aircraft of No. 16 Air Observation Post Flight were taken ashore soon after the initial landing to control artillery fire and carry out reconnaissance duties. A strip 220 yards long was prepared by army engineers for these aircraft, but it was not suitable. Flying Officer McIntyre,[7] with Captain Ket[8] as observer, attempted to take off on 2nd May, but the Auster crashed into an obstruction at the end of the runway and Ket died later from injuries then received, and McIntyre was injured and had to be evacuated. The Austers were then transferred to the Tarakan airfield and began operations there from 6th May.

Until the R.A.A.F. fighter squadrons were established ashore, air patrols over Tarakan were provided by the Thirteenth Air Force, which had four fighters on station during the day and two night fighters on station for dawn and dusk cover. In the original planning, the R.A.A.F. was to take over when their aircraft began operation out of the Tarakan airfield which was to be ready for use on 7th May.

Two airfield construction squadrons (Nos. 1 and 8) went ashore with the invaders on assault day to work on the airfield. They were to construct an all-weather runway 5,000 feet long and to increase the parking space to accommodate two wings and a half of Australian aircraft. The construction squadrons had ample equipment. Tractors, bulldozers, 12-yard scoops, power graders, power shovels and more than 200 motor vehicles ranging from jeeps to 25-ton low loaders, poured from the mouths of the L.S.T's. Difficulty was experienced getting the equipment ashore, but this did not delay the work, because the airfield was not taken until the evening of 5th May.

Group Captain Rooney, commanding officer of No. 61 Airfield Construction Wing, made an inspection of the airfield and found that it had been seriously damaged. In addition, it was waterlogged, and apparently had been abandoned several months earlier by the Japanese. There were mines everywhere. However, Rooney's squadrons began work on 6th May.

The Japanese shelled the strip and sent in raiding parties to cause casualties and damage. Leading Aircraftman Irvine,[9] a guard of No. 2 Aerodrome Defence Squadron, was killed in action during a skirmish with an enemy infiltration party in the early hours of 5th May. The enemy lost three dead in this action, which took place at the rear of No. 1 Airfield Construction Squadron camp area. Mines and booby traps delayed progress and heavy rain marred the efforts of the engineers. In two days (6th and 7th May) a bomb-disposal unit of the R.A.A.F. found and defused 114 mines on the airstrip and dispersal areas. It was obvious that

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[7] F-Lt J. W. McIntyre, 422657. 5 and 4 Sqns, and 16 AOP Flight. Salesman; of Lismore, NSW; b. 23 Oct 1923.

[8] Capt S. A. Ket, VX87771 AIF. Attached 35 Sqn, Air Liaison Section. Solicitor; of Ripponlea, Vic; b. Caulfield, Vic, 15 May 1915. Died from injuries in aircraft accident 3 May 1945.

[9] LAC T. J. Irvine, 76794. 71, 75, 23, 22 Sqns and 2 Aaerodrome Defence Sqn. Furniture remover; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 29 Nov 1907. Killed in action 5 May 1945.

the strip could not be made ready to receive the squadrons of First T.A.F. for some time, and as a result it was necessary for the Thirteenth Air Force to continue to supply air patrols in the Tarakan area.

Air Commodore Cobby established his advanced headquarters ashore, and it became partly operational on 5th May. On the same day, however, he left for Morotai. Air Commodore Scherger, his successor as air officer commanding, arrived at Morotai on 10th May and took over the command. Group Captain Murdoch[1] had already arrived to replace Group Captain Gibson as senior air staff officer, and Group Captain Duncan[2] arrived soon afterwards to take over the post of senior administrative officer in place of Group Captain Simms.

The Thirteenth Air Force continued to maintain fighters in the Tarakan area until 15th May. The failure to bring the Tarakan airstrip into a serviceable state by the prescribed time, forced Air Vice-Marshal Bostock to change the original plans and Beaufighters of No. 77 Wing and Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron were ordered to move to Sanga Sanga airfield in the Sulu archipelago, from where they were to provide air cover over Tarakan. No. 76 Squadron began carrying out this duty on 16th May when the commanding officer, Squadron Leader Jones, took off at 6 a.m., with Flying Officer Keritz[3] in company, to patrol the island. This duty continued daily, except when weather interfered. The main party of No. 76 Squadron, comprising eighty ground staff and the air echelon, had arrived at Sanga Sanga on 15th May. No. 76 Squadron covered the Tarakan area in the morning and the Beaufighters took over the duty in the afternoon. This cover continued until the end of May with little incident. A few shots only were fired at the enemy.

While the Sanga Sanga airfield was serviceable and suitable, space was available there for only a limited number of aircraft and, in order to accommodate more, a detachment of No. 6 Airfield Construction Squadron was moved in from Morotai on 24th May. By 4th June it had extended space for one Kittyhawk squadron and three Beaufighter squadrons. The ground echelons of the Beaufighter squadrons (Nos. 22, 30 and 31), which had gone to Tarakan, were now brought over to Sanga Sanga by barges. The air echelons, which had remained at Morotai, awaiting the completion of the Tarakan airfield, flew in as space became available.

In addition to covering Tarakan, No. 76 Squadron carried out a number of attacks on Sandakan and Kudat. On 27th May thirteen Kittyhawks from the squadron, cooperating with Thirteenth Air Force aircraft and American patrol torpedo boats, helped carry out a minor assault on Sandakan, during which considerable destruction was inflicted.

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[1] AVM A. M. Murdoch, CBE, 58. Comd 1 AOS 1940-41, 221 Sqn RAF 1941-42; SASO HQ Eastern Area 1943-44, HQ N-W Area 1944-45, 1 TAF 1945. Regular air force offr; of Elsternwick, Vic; b. Elsternwick, 9 Dec 1912.

[2] Gp Capt W. J. Duncan, OBE, 270065. Dep Dir Personal Services RAAF HQ 1941; RAAF Liaison Offr Cairo 1941-44; comd RAF Desert Supply Column 1942, RAAF Stn Richmond 1944-45; SAO 1 TAF 1945. Plantation owner; of Rabaul, NG; b. Newcastle, NSW, 4 Apr 1902.

[3] Sqn Ldr W. C. Keritz, MBE, 418849; 76 Sqn. Hardware salesman; of Caulfield, Vic; b. Elsternwick, Vic, 6 Dec 1922.

Two Beaufighters encountered Japanese aircraft in the air on 29th May, the first time a Beaufighter had met the enemy in the air for eighteen months. Flight Lieutenants Madigan[4] and Hewlett,[5] who were patrolling over north Borneo, saw two Dinahs but although the Beaufighters scored hits with cannon shells the enemy aircraft escaped in the clouds and mountains.

Meanwhile, back at Tarakan, all the skill and energy of the construction squadron men had failed to bring the airfield into an operational state. Fifty points of rain which fell on 10th May had turned the airstrip into a quagmire. On the night of 19th May an enemy 75-mm gun shelled it, damaging an anti-aircraft post but causing no casualties. The engineers continued to work on the strip, but the shelling began again next night, and hardly a night passed without small parties of the enemy appearing on the camp perimeter. The infiltrators were usually armed with grenades, fused shells, and knives, but seldom carried small arms. Lines of fire were cleared around each camp area, and floodlights were used to light them up.

Towards the end of May, enemy aircraft began raiding Tarakan at night, dropping bombs which did not, however, damage Allied installations. A raid was carried out by three or four Jakes on 26th May. Anti-aircraft guns and searchlights engaged the raiders and the gunners claimed they hit one enemy aircraft. On the 28th, a small formation of Jakes was picked up ninety miles from base. They dropped four bombs, but caused no damage.

A large party of the enemy attempted to infiltrate to the airfield on 31st May and at midnight Sergeant Bradshaw,[6] of No. 1 Airfield Construction Squadron, was killed by a grenade, which also seriously wounded Sergeant Russenberg.[7] Four Japanese were killed by men of the construction squadrons during this skirmish. Work continued throughout the night, in spite of the interruptions.

Construction of the airstrip was a continual battle against very bad soil conditions, high water table and lack of suitable paving materials. Intelligence had indicated that there was sandstone available, but it had not been found, nor had any other suitable rock. From 6th June only four days without rain were required to allow the completion of formation and mat laying, but there were only two rainless days from 6th to 25th June. Continued wet weather had a depressing effect on the spirits of many of the men and they began to despair of ever completing the job. Aware of the men's despondency, Scherger sent a message praising their efforts and saying that they had achieved much to bring the airstrip to its "present state, under conditions which no engineers have yet had to face in this area".

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[4] F-Lt W. J. Madigan, DFC, 416507; 30 Sqn. Industrial chemist; of Adelaide; b. Adelaide, 19 Jul 1918.

[5] F-Lt H. B. Hewlett, 404500; 30 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Darwin; b. Sydney, 31 Aug 1916.

[6] Sgt K. G. Bradshaw, 8406; 1 Airfield Construction Sqn. Fitter's labourer; of New Town, Tas; b. Hayes, Tas, 4 Sep 1913. Killed in action 31 May 1945.

[7] Sgt H. H. W. Russenberg, 57506; 8 Airfield Construction Sqn. Radio and electrical serviceman; of Geelong, Vic; b. Wedderburn, Vic, 18 Jan 1910.

Progress on the ground was slow, with the enemy fighting back from entrenched positions. The most determined resistance was encountered near Mt Api and the Juata oilfield. In other areas the Australians met some sharp resistance but made steady progress. Sixteen days after the landing two-thirds of the island was controlled by the 26th Brigade. Vigorous patrolling and harassing fire kept the enemy confined to limited areas. A feature of the attack on enemy strongholds was the accurate bombardment by supporting aircraft, artillery and naval units. The dropping of napalm fire bombs was effective. On one feature, where he had been strongly dug in and offering stubborn resistance, a high-explosive and napalm strike had caused the enemy to abandon his position.

By the evening of 15th June organised resistance had ended, and the enemy survivors retreated to the north and north-east. They were hunted by patrols and many were captured or killed when attempting to leave Tarakan on improvised rafts. By 31st July 1,540 Japanese dead had been counted and an additional 235 were believed to have been killed. The cost to the Australian forces was considerable. The killed totalled 225, and the wounded 629, while more than 1,000 had been evacuated as a result of illness.

Throughout the early phase of the Tarakan operation, by far the greatest proportion of First T.A.F. combat strength remained at Morotai, where it could do nothing to contribute to the success of the operation. The failure to develop an airfield was the cause. Since the operation was undertaken primarily for the purpose of establishing an airfield for use against other points in the Netherlands East Indies, Tarakan must be regarded as a failure. The fault was partly due to incorrect intelligence concerning the possibilities of developing an airfield in such a place.

Scherger, commenting on the Tarakan operation after the war, said: "It is perhaps true that OBOE 1 was a failure on the part of the R.A.A.F., but one must qualify this by saying that the task set was impossible of achievement by any air force; against this it is equally true to say that we continued to base our plans for air support of OBOES 6 (Labuan-Brunei Bay) and 2 (Balikpapan) on the operation of attack and fighter types from Tarakan, and it was quite obvious (at least to myself and those of my staff who visited there) that a satisfactory strip could never be constructed, nor indeed could a strip be made, capable of intensive use for even a short period."

## CHAPTER 28

# LABUAN

ON 8th May, eight days after the invasion of Tarakan Island, the fighting in Europe ended. This event, naturally, did not produce in the Pacific the tremendous sense of relief that it did in Europe. Nobody knew how long the Pacific war would go on, and among the hundreds of thousands of men still at war in the Pacific, this uncertainty robbed the occasion of much of the meaning it had in Europe.

An entry in the unit history sheet of No. 76 Squadron reflects something of the thoughts and reactions of the men in the forward areas:

> There was no great outburst of enthusiasm as the approaching end had been obvious in the last few days. . . . In the evening Padre Stephenson[1] conducted a well-attended Thanksgiving service. As if to emphasise that the war was only half over, a bomb-laden Liberator passed over the mess on its way to deliver a cargo to some Jap base.

In early May, Lord Louis Mountbatten's campaign had culminated in the fall of Rangoon and the collapse of Japanese resistance in Burma. This news and the news of the fall of Germany came to the men and women of Japan with the thunder of bombs and the drone of hundreds of American bombers over their home islands. Their industries and cities were crumbling under a terrible bombardment, while a bitter land battle was taking place at Okinawa, almost on the doorstep of Japan proper.

The course of events in Europe had already enabled Britain to send a carrier fleet against Japan and, immediately the war ended in Europe, plans were drawn up for the transfer to the Pacific of the American Eighth Air Force, to be re-equipped with the new Superfortress bombers. In addition, land forces in the Pacific were to be reinforced with the First American Army which had fought in North Africa and from the Normandy beach-head to the heart of Germany. The Pacific theatre could now receive the entire resources of the Allied nations.

General Kenney was to command all American Army air forces in the Pacific except the Superfortresses of the Strategic Bomber Force which remained directly under General Arnold and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kenney planned to move his entire Far East Air Force into Kyushu Island if the Japanese did not surrender before they were invaded. This would leave ample room at Okinawa and the Philippines to accommodate air groups transferred from the European theatre of operations. However, by June there was still a shortage of air bases in the Pacific and this was causing a bottleneck in the deployment of air forces. The captured islands within range of Japan were overcrowded with air installations.

When hostilities in Europe ended, the Australian Government had to determine the future tasks of its army, navy and air force in the war

[1] Rev A. Stephenson. 61 AC Wing and 76 Sqn. Methodist minister; of Boulder, WA; b. Middlesborough, Yorkshire, Eng, 22 Oct 1901.

against Japan. Except for aircrews engaged in Europe, the Mediterranean and Burma, almost the entire Australian war effort had been devoted since 1943 to the Pacific war. While, therefore, the end of the European fighting brought great relief from the burden of war to America, Britain, Russia and other countries engaged in the European theatre, it brought little relief to Australia. This point was emphasised in a cablegram on 1st June 1945 sent by the Australian Government to its delegation at the San Francisco Conference.[2] The message pointed out that "there will be a considerable demobilisation of forces in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada, and New Zealand has already made certain reductions. Australia's war record entitles her to carry out an adjustment in the man-power position which, while providing for a military effort in the war against Japan which is equitable in comparison with those of other Allied countries, also enables the acute stringencies to be removed and places the civil economy on a comparable satisfactory footing to those of other countries for transition to the post-war period."

At an Advisory War Council meeting, Mr Spender said he considered it unfair that Australia should be subjected to a greater strain than other countries during the remaining phases of the war in the Pacific, and be called on to give them two years' start in post-war reconstruction. While the Government, however, strongly desired to benefit equally with other countries from the European victory, it considered it equally important that Australia should continue to play "a notable and worthy part until final victory is achieved".

The War Cabinet met on 28th May and noted the following reasons for Australia's continued participation:

(1) Australia received considerable aid from the United States when this country was in grave danger of attack. It would probably be the desire of the Australian people that their forces should fight alongside the Americans to the end of the war as a cooperative expression of their gratitude. The American people would no doubt appreciate the spirit prompting such a desire, and it should do much to strengthen future Australian-American relations which are of paramount importance from the aspect of security in the post-war period.

(2) The Australian forces have fought with the Americans since 1942 and formed bonds of comradeship. General Blamey says that the slogan "on to Tokyo" reflects the desire of the Australian forces to be associated with the forward offensive.

(3) There have been criticisms that the liquidation of by-passed Japanese forces is not by itself a worthy effort for our Forces. The reasons for the non-participation in the Philippines campaign have been made clear. But with the American progress towards Japan, the operations against Borneo, the Netherlands East Indies and Malaya have assumed the nature of large-scale mopping-up campaigns. From the aspect of prestige, it is of greater importance to Australia to be associated with the drive to defeat Japan,

[2] The San Francisco Conference was convened to prepare a charter of international organisation, and a court of international justice, as agreed upon first at Moscow, in October 1943, by the governments of the UK, US, the Soviet Union and China, and more definitely in February 1945 at Yalta, by Mr Churchill, President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin, when it was announced that a United Nations conference would be called at San Francisco on 25 April.

though, for reasons of British and Australian prestige, it would be desirable to have a token force in the recapture of Malaya, in order to avenge the defeat of 1941.

With these aims in view, the War Cabinet decided that at least one division, with ancillary units, should be assigned to General MacArthur for the offensive against Japan. A token force was also to be assigned to South-East Asia to aid in the recapture of Singapore.[3] Other forces would continue to be assigned in New Guinea, New Britain and the Solomon Islands for neutralising or garrison duties.

The First Tactical Air Force was to continue its assignment to General MacArthur for his forward advance. In addition, another three R.A.A.F. squadrons from the European theatre were to be provided as a contribution to an R.A.F. very-long-range task force, which was to be sent to the Pacific.

Mr Forde and Dr Evatt, who had gone to the San Francisco conference, were told to convey these decisions of the Government to the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff and the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. Until these authorities had decided the future strategy of the Pacific war, the Government would be in the dark and could make only tentative proposals and arrangements.

On 5th June, the War Cabinet met again and tentatively decided that the strengths of the three Services for the remainder of the war would be:

Navy: Existing strength.
Army: Reduction of operational forces to three divisions.
Air Force: Corresponding proportionate reduction to that of the army. (This could not be determined until the effect of a reduction of 50,000 for the army and the air force was apportioned and the effect of the return of personnel from overseas was worked out.)

The end of the fighting in Europe and the likelihood of a reduction of the air force contribution to the Pacific war meant that Australia had a big surplus of trained aircrews; within six months, 17,000 members of the R.A.A.F. would be repatriated from overseas. The War Cabinet therefore ordered the release of surplus airmen to civil life and the discontinuance of aircrew basic training.

On 4th July, Mr Churchill addressed a cablegram to Mr Curtin, informing him that the over-all objective in the war against Japan was to force the unconditional surrender of the Japanese and that for this purpose it might now be possible to provide a British Commonwealth force of some three to five divisions, carried in British shipping and supported by a British naval force with a small tactical air force component. He said it would be "most welcome if an Australian division would join this force, the R.A.N. form part of the naval forces involved and the R.A.A.F. squadrons part of the air component".

However, the sending of this force would have to await the opening of the Malacca Strait which was expected at the end of 1945. The Aus-

[3] It was found later that this proposal could not be given effect because the planning for the Malayan operation was too far advanced.

tralian Defence Committee advised the Government that Churchill's proposals appeared "unrealistic and impractical", because the force could not be made ready before April 1946, if it had to await the opening of the Strait of Malacca.

On 5th July Mr Curtin died, and on 13th July Mr Chifley[4] was appointed Prime Minister. Chifley, acting on the advice of the Defence Committee and his Cabinet, replied to Churchill on 20th July, drawing attention to this aspect. He said:

> Your cablegram anticipates the opening of the Malacca Strait by the end of the year, and the development of a British Commonwealth Force after that date. It would, therefore, not be possible for this Force to be organised, trained and deployed before somewhere about April 1946. In the meantime, it is understood that American forces will begin the invasion of the main islands at a comparatively early date. There is also the aspect of Soviet participation which is the subject of your cablegram of 5th July. Time is therefore the essence of the contract and the essential consideration is actual participation in the main offensive against Japan.

Churchill received Chifley's message when he was conferring at Potsdam with representatives of the United States and Russia. The Combined Chiefs of Staff had already agreed in principle that a Commonwealth land, sea and air force, should take part in the main operations against Japan, and Churchill invited Chifley to appoint representatives to consult with MacArthur, whom the Combined Chiefs had just appointed to command all American ground and air forces, other than naval air forces, in the Pacific. The Government appointed General Blamey, with Air Vice-Marshal Bostock and Air Vice-Marshal Jones as air advisers.

MacArthur had placed proposals for the use of British forces before the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff. His plan was that British participation should be limited to a corps of three divisions (one British, one Canadian and one Australian), the corps to be available in the objective area about March 1946, and to be employed initially as an assault reserve afloat. It was to be equipped, as far as possible, with American equipment. A small tactical air force[5] would be used "if possible". In London, for planning purposes, it was assumed that this force would ultimately comprise fifteen Commonwealth squadrons and it was hoped that R.A.F., R.A.A.F. and R.N.Z.A.F. units would be included. Mustang aircraft were favoured in order to ease the logistical problem. As it was probable that R.A.A.F. units would comprise the greater part of the force, an R.A.A.F. officer was likely to be appointed the commander. Mr Drakeford, on 10th August, proposed that the Australian contribution should be six squadrons of Mustangs organised into two wings. Each wing was to be complete with ancillary units. However, the end of the war on 15th August brought the problem of a task force for use in the war against Japan to a sudden end.

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[4] Rt Hon J. B. Chifley, MHR 1928-31, 1940-51. Min for Defence 1931, Post War Reconstruction 1942-45; Treasurer 1941-49; Prime Minister 1945-49. B. Bathurst, NSW, 22 Sep 1885. Died 12 Jun 1951.

[5] Cablegram, Bruce to Chifley, 2 Aug 1945.

Under the MONTCLAIR plan for the campaign in Borneo and the Indies, the capture of Balikpapan was to have been the next operation mounted after Tarakan, with the target date set at 23rd May. However, G.H.Q. postponed the Balikpapan operation, and, on 21st April, issued an operational instruction directing forces of the South-West Pacific Area to seize the Brunei Bay area of British North Borneo.

The 9th Australian Division (less the 26th Brigade) was to be the assault force. It was soon learned that elements of this division could not arrive at the staging base (Morotai) until a full week after the time set for the landing at Labuan. The invasion time had therefore to be altered to the 10th June.

The operation was to be known as OBOE 6. After a comprehensive pre-invasion air bombardment, simultaneous landings were planned on the island of Labuan, which dominates the entrance to Brunei Bay, and at Brunei on the mainland. Subsequently, operations were to be mounted by amphibious means to capture the Miri-Lutong and Seria oilfields as early as possible after the first landings.

Labuan Island is roughly triangular in shape, with the apex to the north and two large inlets in the base. The eastern inlet is Victoria Harbour, a sheltered deep-water port suitable for cruisers, destroyers and flying-boats. Labuan would provide air and fleet bases, which would complete a chain of mutually-supporting bases from which the Allies could cover the Asian coast from Singapore to Shanghai.[6] In addition, the move into British North Borneo would make available considerable oil and rubber resources. There was an oil-producing field at Miri and another at Seria. Crude oil from both these fields had been processed at Lutong refinery. About 50 per cent of the total pre-war production (5,730,000 barrels yearly) of Seria could be used as bunker fuel straight out of the ground.

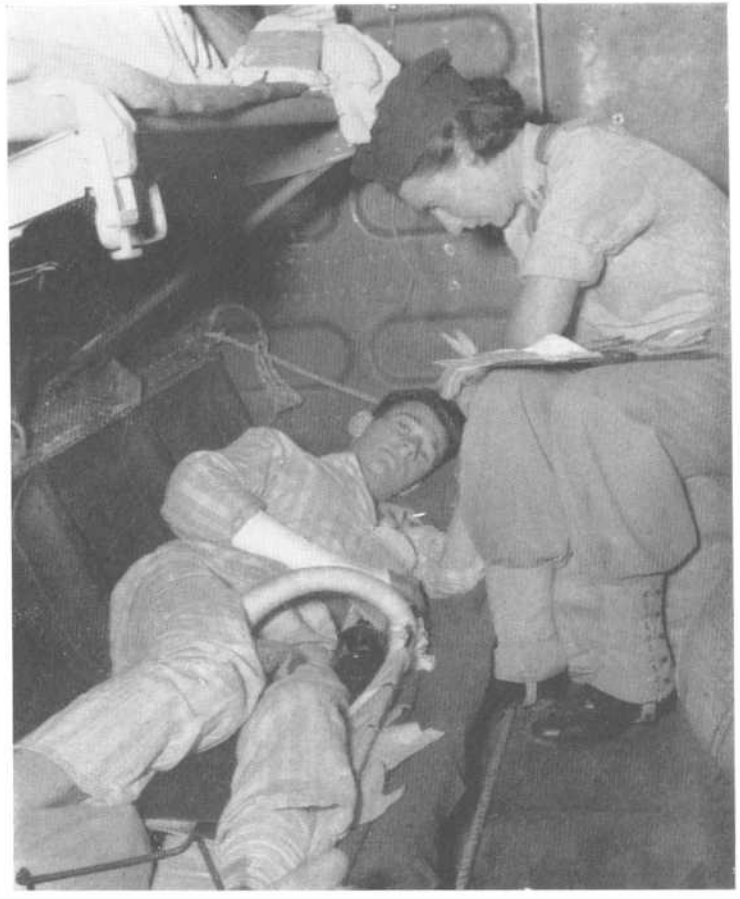
The plan for the air side of the Labuan-Brunei Bay operation followed very closely the Tarakan plan. General Kenney allotted to R.A.A.F. Command the threefold tasks of (1) neutralising all enemy resources capable of interfering with the operation; (2) supporting the 9th Division during the assault and consolidation phases; and (3) establishing air forces on Labuan Island as soon as the airfield became available. First T.A.F. and the Thirteenth Air Force were to be used for these tasks, and Fifth Air Force was directed to lend two bomber groups (Nos. 90 and 380) to the Thirteenth Air Force for the purpose of intensifying the pre-assault bombardment in the Brunei Bay area. In addition, heavy-bomber squadrons of North-Western Area and Western Area were given the task of neutralising enemy bases which were beyond the range of the heavy bombers, both American and Australian, operating from Morotai and the Philippines. First T.A.F. was to establish at Labuan one fighter wing (comprising three squadrons of Kittyhawks—Nos. 76, 77 and 82—of No. 81 Wing); one squadron of Spitfires (No. 457 Squadron); one army-cooperation wing (No. 83); one attack wing (No. 86)—armed with Beau-

[6] An advanced naval base for the British Pacific Fleet was particularly desired.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

During the war women in the W.A.A.A.F. efficiently performed many duties in non-combatant areas, for which men would otherwise have been required, and thus made more men available for duty in forward areas. Here A.C.W's Mavis Quinn and Jean Hewens (top) and A.C.W. Patricia Mason (lower) repair the wing of a Catalina in North-Eastern Area in June 1944.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

Senior Sister E. Bray of the R.A.A.F. Nursing Service, attending to a wounded member of the A.I.F., who is being flown to a hospital in a rear area by the R.A.A.F. Medical Air Evacuation Unit.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

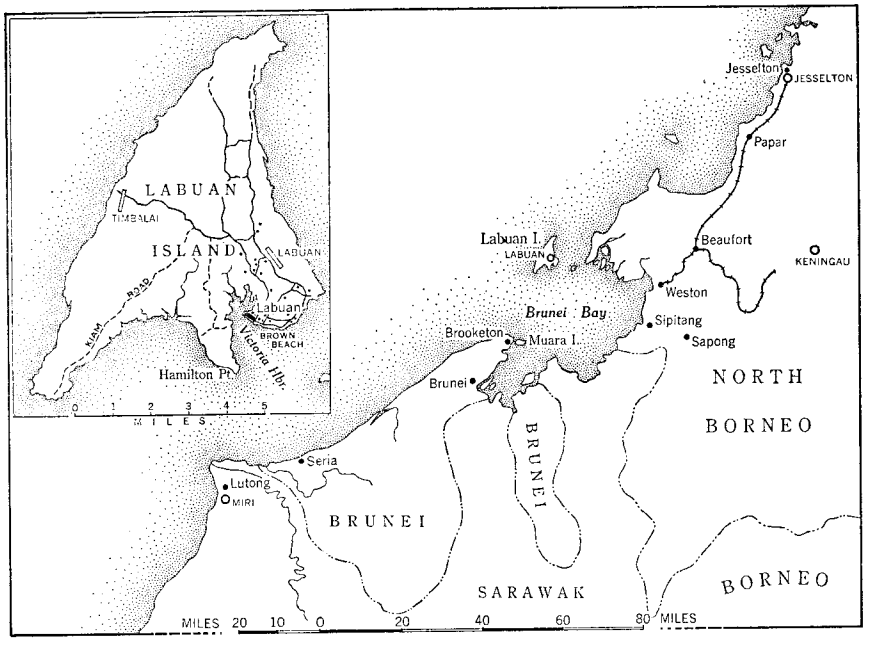
Engineers of No. 61 Airfield Construction Wing removing their gear after completing the repair of the Sepinggang airfield, Borneo, on 15th July 1945.



*(R.A.A.F.)*

The fighter strip at Morotai in 1945, showing four Kittyhawks returning from an offensive sweep, and many others parked closely together in the dispersal areas.

fighters and Mosquitos, in addition to search and air-sea rescue aircraft. The search aircraft were to be provided by No. 13 Squadron which was being moved from North-Western Area to Labuan for reconnaissance duties.




With the imminent fall of Okinawa and the further withdrawal of enemy air forces to the defence of the homeland, little air opposition other than sporadic night raids was expected. Limited air strength only remained in the Netherlands East Indies and South-East Asia areas. In the Netherlands East Indies there was an estimated fighting strength of not more than 29 fighters and 16 bombers; in South-East Asia, including Sumatra and French Indo-China, some 155 fighters and 28 bombers were available.

Again, surprise was not possible. The enemy would expect further landings in Borneo, but, on the other hand, would have difficulty in predicting the precise area of attack. Even if he were informed that a landing was to be made in Brunei Bay, the enemy was not in a position to benefit greatly from the knowledge because of the constant disruption of his movements by land and sea. It was estimated that about 2,500 men, mainly base and service troops, would be in the target area, under the control of the headquarters of *XXXVII Army*.

Pre-assault bombardment began early in May with a raid by a formation of the Thirteenth Air Force on Balikpapan, followed by another raid on the same target the following day. The raiders dropped their loads

on Manggar airfield. On 3rd May, the Brunei Bay area was also attacked by two flights of Lightnings, six Venturas and a squadron of Mitchells which bombed targets in Victoria town, on Labuan Island.

Targets engaged during the pre-assault bombardment phase included Balikpapan, Manggar, Sepinggang, Balan, Jesselton, Sibu, Bintulu, Kuching, Keningau, Bandjermasin, Brunei, Brooketon, Miri, Seria, Pontianak, Celebes, Singapore, Java and the Flores Islands.

After bombing Kendari, Menado and other targets in Celebes early in May, the Liberators of No. 82 Wing on 15th May struck at Manggar near Balikpapan and dropped fifteen tons of bombs, causing fires. They also dropped leaflets over the target and, on returning to base, reported a considerable number of motor vehicles on the road which led north from Balikpapan.

The main body of the Australian Liberator wing was still at Fenton in the Northern Territory. Liberators of this wing which had been used at a high rate of effort in the Tarakan phase of the Borneo campaign were flown back to Fenton by their crews for servicing. They were replaced by other aircraft which were flown up to Morotai where they began, early in May, to meet the commitments of the wing for the Labuan-Brunei operation. First T.A.F. had directed the wing to carry out bombing strikes—mainly against Celebes—and to supply air observer aircraft which were to operate from Palawan in the Philippines where arrangements were being made for them.

On 19th May Squadron Leader Bowman[7] led another six Liberators on a strike at Balikpapan in which bombs were dropped on a float-plane base. Two days later he led six more to attack Sepinggang airfield at Balikpapan, but could not bomb the target because of cloud, and, as an alternative, released the bombs on a barracks block, many buildings being destroyed.

On 28th May No. 82 Wing again sent six Liberators from Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons to bomb Balikpapan. Bombs from three of these aircraft fell into the sea, but the rest exploded in the target area. Anti-aircraft fire damaged one of the Liberators. On this day, heavy attacks were made as well on Balikpapan and Samarinda by the Thirteenth Air Force. Altogether, seven squadrons of Mitchells and forty-one Liberators (including those from No. 82 Wing) and two flights of Lightnings were in the attacks. The destruction of oil tanks, gun positions, and damage to airfields and buildings resulted.

From this date, until assault day at Labuan, the Australian Liberators continued to bomb targets around Balikpapan and in Celebes. There was little incident during these missions, although the crews at times reported heavy anti-aircraft fire, especially over Balikpapan.

Meanwhile, First T.A.F. Beaufighters and Kittyhawks were coming into the picture over North Borneo, operating from their new base at Sanga Sanga.

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[7] Sqn Ldr K. G. Bowman, 260781. 74 Wing and 21 Sqn. Grazier; of "Wargundy", Craboon, NSW; b. Craboon, 30 Jun 1916.

The original planning for Labuan-Brunei Bay had in mind the use of Tarakan as the base from which close air support would be provided. But when it became apparent that this airstrip would not be made ready in time, Sanga Sanga had been substituted. After extension of parking areas at Sanga Sanga, the three Beaufighter squadrons (Nos. 22, 30 and 31) were flown in. The Beaufighters were not employed until 3rd June. The failure at Tarakan had therefore resulted in loss of effort in the OBOE 6 operation.

On 3rd June, six Beaufighters of No. 30 Squadron strafed oil tanks at Bangsal, three of which burned. They strafed oil derricks and about twenty buildings, killing one Japanese in the tower of an oil derrick. Some twenty other Japanese ran off the road into the jungle. On the same day, another six Beaufighters of No. 22 Squadron, led by Flight Lieutenant McSharry,[8] bombed and strafed Brunei town. They dropped twelve bombs, destroying two long buildings with direct hits.

The Beaufighters and Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron were sent to attack enemy reinforcement routes in North Borneo. Intelligence reports reaching Morotai had indicated that the enemy forces were withdrawing from the east coast of Borneo and concentrating at Jesselton. Sorties carried out by the Beaufighters and Kittyhawks along these routes totalled seventy, but results of their attacks and those made by American aircraft were difficult to assess because of the heavy jungle country in which the movement was taking place. During the last five days before the landing at Brunei, the air assault reached its maximum intensity. In this period a total of 3,088 sorties was flown by the air forces engaged. Only a small proportion of these sorties was flown by First T.A.F.

Beaufighters of No. 77 Wing had been directed to supply aircraft over the objective area for any special purpose, and the commander of "support aircraft" directed them two days before the landing to provide cover for underwater demolition teams which were breaching obstacles on the beaches at Labuan in readiness for the landing operations. The Beaufighters carried out this task, accurately attacking enemy-held areas within a hundred yards of the men working on the dangerous demolition task. On the day before the landing, Liberators of the Thirteenth Air Force bombed Labuan without obtaining permission and thereby endangered the lives of the demolition teams working in the area bombed.

No. 30 Squadron lost a crew on 9th June (Flying Officer McKenzie[9] and Sergeant Gilfillan[1]). Four Beaufighters from the squadron were bombing Beaufort where they destroyed a building and damaged two others, when the aircraft piloted by McKenzie struck trees and crashed; it immediately burst into flames and other pilots reported "nil signs survivors".

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[8] F-Lt B. J. McSharry, 404710; 22 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Mt Morgan, Qld; b. Mt Morgan, 9 Jul 1920.

[9] F-O G. S. McKenzie, 434178; 30 Sqn. Clerk; of Coorparoo, Qld; b. Gympie, Qld, 11 Oct 1924. Killed in action 9 Jun 1945.

[1] Sgt W. J. Gilfillan, 442384; 30 Sqn. Student; of Giles Corner, SA; b. North Adelaide, 7 Dec 1923. Killed in action 9 Jun 1945.

The convoy carrying the landing forces had left Morotai on 4th June. More than 6,000 R.A.A.F. men were on the transports in addition to the men of the 9th Division (less the 26th Brigade). There was no enemy air or sea interference. The convoy had an uncomfortable time in the first three nights out when tropical rainstorms lashed the decks. Stretchers and bedding became soaked and flimsy tarpaulin coverings were swept away. Soldiers and airmen presented a bedraggled, unhappy picture. Only one Japanese aircraft attempted to interfere with the landing operation. It dropped one bomb at 6 a.m. on 10th June. The bomb missed a landing craft and the lone Japanese bomber made off under a hail of anti-aircraft fire.

The opening air bombardment on the day of the assault landing was carried out by eight squadrons of Liberators—six from the Thirteenth Air Force and two from the R.A.A.F. The attack took the form of high-level bombing of the area immediately behind the beach-heads with anti-personnel bombs. Seven of the R.A.A.F. Liberators were from No. 23 Squadron and were led by Wing Commander Dunne. They had left Darwin the previous day, landing at Morotai, and then had taken off again early next morning on the Labuan strike. The other seven Liberators were from Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons. Over Sanghi Islands at 3 a.m. on the 10th, the Liberators saw numerous lights, probably from fishing boats. Shortly before 8 a.m. these Liberators attacked at Labuan, dropping their bombs from 7,000 feet. The bombing was accurate, only three of the bombs falling short of the target.

Meanwhile, the assault landing forces which had been standing off shore since first light, prepared to move in. The supporting naval force, including one light cruiser, carried out an hour's bombardment, then rocket and mortar ships raced inshore ahead of the assault waves, firing on fixed ranges, so that their fire swept inland from the beach as the craft neared the shore.

At this stage, the headquarters ship USS *Rocky Mount* which carried Air Vice-Marshal Bostock and Air Commodore Scherger, ordered the R.A.A.F. observation Liberator, which was waiting overhead, to get down and see if there was any sign of enemy resistance near the beach. None could be seen. So the landing craft set off for the beach. The first landing was made by the 24th Brigade at Hamilton Point at 10.17 a.m. and by 10.30 a.m. tanks and troops had advanced 1,500 yards inland from Brown Beach. By 11.29 p.m. they were within sight of the Labuan airfield.

Again, the Japanese, during the preliminary bombardment, had withdrawn from the beaches to more easily defendable positions farther inland. Few of the enemy could have survived if they had chosen to remain in the beach area. From the R.A.A.F. observation Liberator, which was captained by Wing Commander Bell, and carried an army liaison officer, Australian troops could be seen sauntering along roads, one group advancing towards the airfield and the other moving left towards the town.

Meanwhile, direct air support was being provided by Beaufighters of First T.A.F. and Mitchells of the Thirteenth Air Force. These aircraft had to be available on call to support the infantry when needed, but, because of the light opposition, they were not wanted, and many of them were sent to bomb secondary targets. A group of six Beaufighters from No. 31 Squadron, led by Wing Commander Read, bombed barracks and strafed a road in the afternoon. Another flight, finding no target to attack at Labuan, was sent to bomb a railway bridge at Papar and destroyed it.

Everything went without a hitch at Labuan. The operations were carried out as they were planned. Opposition was slight, so that the merit of the assault lay more in its excellent organisation than on the achievement of results against enemy forces. Scherger, with his S.A.S.O. (Murdoch) and S.O.A. (Duncan), established a command post ashore on the afternoon of assault day.

The Labuan airfield was secured by the troops by last light on 10th June and work on the airstrip began next day. Weather conditions were ideal, greatly assisting the operation.

The 20th Brigade landings at Muara Island and Brooketon on the Borneo mainland were equally successful. Muara Island was completely reconnoitred but no enemy troops were found there. Brooketon had been captured and by nightfall on the 10th the 20th Brigade had advanced 3,000 yards towards Brunei town.

On 11th June six Beaufighters, led by Squadron Leader J. C. Black, bombed and strafed enemy tunnels in areas indicated to them by the commander at Labuan. During the take-off of another flight of Beaufighters of No. 31 Squadron on this day, two of the aircraft collided and crashed into the sea off Sanga Sanga. As a result, Flying Officers Cowley[2] and Wall[3] and Flight Sergeant Johnston[4] were killed. Warrant Officer Holmes,[5] the pilot of one of the Beaufighters was rescued later, suffering from slight concussion and lacerations. On the same day Flying Officer Scott[6] of No. 22 Squadron crashed on take-off from Sanga Sanga and was killed. A Beaufort of No. 9 Local Air Supply Unit, taking off to spray D.D.T. at Brunei Bay, also crashed on this day, killing the three members of the crew. Three other Beauforts from this unit carried on with the mission and did good work spraying the objective areas with insect-killing D.D.T.

On the third day of the operation, Beaufighters of No. 77 Wing and the Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron had to leave Sanga Sanga airfield for Morotai to make room for a group of Lightnings of the Thirteenth Air Force which was moved forward to support the invasion of Balikpapan. This was made necessary because the airfield at Tarakan, which

[2] F-O J. D. Cowley, 421188; 31 Sqn. Clerk; of Granville, NSW; b. Granville, 15 Sep 1921. Killed in aircraft accident 11 Jun 1945.

[3] F-O M. J. Wall, 49326; 31 Sqn. Public servant; of Werribee, Vic; b. St Kilda, Vic, 20 Mar 1922. Killed in aircraft accident 11 Jun 1945.

[4] F-Sgt A. H. Johnston, 19195. 11 and 31 Sqns. Fitter; of Randwick, NSW; b. Willoughby, NSW, 14 Feb 1920. Killed in aircraft accident 11 Jun 1945.

[5] W-O J. K. Holmes, 411068; 31 Sqn. Auctioneer's clerk; of Tamworth, NSW; b. Toowoomba, Qld, 21 Jun 1919.

[6] F-O R. P. Scott, 432894; 22 Sqn. Clerk; of Punchbowl, NSW; b. Murwillumbah, NSW, 19 Jan 1925. Killed in aircraft accident 11 Jun 1945.

was originally intended for this purpose, was still not ready for use. On the fourth day at Labuan until R.A.A.F. aircraft could operate from the Labuan airfield, close support for the fighting was provided by the Thirteenth Air Force from a base on Palawan Island. However, by 17th June, two aircraft of No. 76 Squadron (piloted by the commanding officer, Squadron Leader Jones and Pilot Officer Furze[7]) landed their aircraft on the rough strip at Labuan. These were the first two operational aircraft to land there and next day the two pilots took off on the first operational sortie from Labuan. They met with unexpected success when they discovered two enemy aircraft on the ground at Keningau, and attacked and destroyed them.

Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron had been ordered to proceed to Labuan, arriving about six days after assault day, and on arrival to assume responsibility for day and night defence of the base. Twelve aircraft of the squadron led by Squadron Leader Watson, left Morotai en route to Labuan on 17th June, refuelled at Zamboanga and then went to Palawan. Next day they arrived at Labuan, but, because of the poor condition of the strip at this stage, two aircraft crashed on landing and were written off. On 18th June, the Spitfires and Kittyhawks took over responsibility for close air support, the Spitfires carrying out their first operational flights from Labuan on 19th June. Austers on this day also flew four sorties, assisting army operations at Labuan, Weston and Beaufort.

Japanese air reaction to the invasion of British North Borneo continued to be exceptionally weak; the enemy sent only an occasional nuisance raider. A Nick approached Labuan during the night of 13th-14th June but was intercepted and shot down by an American Black Widow night fighter. Another enemy aircraft was overhead the following night about 11 p.m. It was engaged by searchlights and anti-aircraft guns from the shore and from ships in the harbour and was seen to break up and crash into the sea.

Two Spitfires of No. 457 Squadron, which were on ground alert, were ordered into the air on the 20th when an enemy raider approached. They climbed to 13,000 feet and while circling near Sipitang village, sighted a Dinah some 1,000 feet below. Flight Lieutenant Campbell[8] made an attack on the enemy from below, opening fire at 250 yards and closing to 50 yards. Then Flight Lieutenant Scrimgeour[9] made an attack from slightly below and at the rear, opening fire at 350 yards and closing to 50 yards. When the second attack was broken off, the port engine of the Dinah was on fire, with pieces flying from it. Both pilots made further attacks and scored hits. They followed it down and saw it crash and explode on the ground fifty-five miles east of Labuan. This was No. 457 Squadron's first air combat since 1943 and boosted the spirits of the men considerably.

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[7] P-O M. M. Furze, 13407. 36 and 76 Sqns. Motor mechanic; of Shepparton, Vic; b. Merbein, Vic, 30 Jan 1923.

[8] F-Lt J. G. B. Campbell, DFC, 403038. 145, 33, 601 Sqns RAF, and 457 Sqn. Student; of Bellevue Hill, NSW; b. Adelaide, 17 Jan 1922.

[9] F-Lt S. G. Scrymgeour, 402986. 453, 24 and 457 Sqns. Clerk; of Waratah, NSW; b. Newcastle, NSW, 12 Dec 1920.

After losing control of the airfield on Labuan Island, the handful of Japanese defenders had withdrawn to a prepared defence pocket for a last-ditch stand. The pocket had been heavily attacked by artillery and naval gun fire and by low-flying Mitchell bombers on 16th June. As the Australian infantry closed in, the Japanese commanding officer decided to attempt to break out. At 10 p.m. on the night of 20th June, two raiding parties left the pocket and made for the beach area for the purpose of inflicting as many casualties and causing as much damage as possible. They achieved temporary surprise in their desperate venture and managed to kill twenty Australians in the beach area before the Australians recovered and mowed them down, killing ninety and taking one prisoner. The following day the pocket was assaulted and taken. Apart from isolated and disorganised bodies of enemy, the capture of the island was now complete.

After the initial landing and the capture of Brunei town, the 20th Brigade moved southwards towards the oilfields. A detachment of troops landed at Lutong on 23rd June and captured the Miri field. Spitfires and Kittyhawks now based on Labuan gave cover for these landings, while Wirraways of No. 4 Squadron carried out a tactical reconnaissance, having arrived that day after a two-day flight from Morotai.

By 25th June, the air echelon of No. 82 Squadron had joined Nos. 457 and 76 Squadrons at Labuan. Pilots of No. 82 Squadron began operations next morning, their first mission being a close-support attack for the 9th Division at Miri. In the afternoon of 26th June, four Kittyhawks strafed Keningau airfield, scoring hits on a fuel dump and camouflaged huts. On his first strafing run Pilot Officer Collins[1] of No. 76 Squadron crashed and was killed.

On the 29th June, five Kittyhawk aircraft of No. 76 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Jones, surprised a Dinah at Keningau airfield. The engines of the Dinah were running and Japanese were aboard it and on the wing. The Kittyhawks destroyed the aircraft and killed its crew.

No. 77 Squadron aircraft arrived at Labuan on 30th June and carried out their first operation from this base on 3rd July, when the squadron bombed and strafed Keningau. On the same day Kittyhawks from Nos. 82 and 77 Squadrons and ten Spitfires from No. 457 bombed and strafed Sapong.

On 4th, 5th and 6th July, aircraft from all squadrons of No. 81 Wing, including the Spitfires, carried out intensive bombing and strafing in support of the 9th Division's operations. In these three days, no less than 230 sorties were flown by Kittyhawks, Spitfires, Wirraways and Austers.

Jones was forced to crash-land on 6th July and had a remarkable escape.

> At about ten minutes to ten (he wrote) I heard a loud report, which I thought was the explosion of a hot round in my guns. Continuing the reconnaissance, I applied my motor with nil results. It was evident that I had received a hit in an

[1] P-O L. Collins, 430438; 76 Sqn. Farmer; of Scoresby, Vic; b. Moreland, Vic, 10 Jan 1925. Killed in action 26 Jun 1945.

oil line which I had first thought was my guns. I immediately called up No. 3 informing him that I was baling out, thinking that the motor would last to enable me to gain more altitude (height was then 450 ft). But the engine was almost seized, so I held off on the tree tops and squashed into the trees, sinking almost gracefully. The nose dropped straight forward, luckily striking no tree trunks. I had come down so near to a road where the Japanese were that I quickly separated my dinghy and made off. I found myself shortly afterwards in a small fast-running stream in the middle of surrounding swamp and the current quickly carried me along in the dinghy which I had inflated and launched. The stream widened to about five yards and eventually led into the main river. . . . At about half past three on the 7th, I sighted two aircraft due west and signalled with my mirror, but they apparently did not see me. I sighted the aircraft again an hour later, flying north. I signalled for about fifteen minutes, when one aircraft saw my mirror flashes and turned towards me . . . as soon as the aircraft departed for base and the other remained to cover me, I immediately paddled out into the centre of the bay. Just on dark the air-sea rescue Catalina alighted, picked me up and returned me to base.

On 13th July eight Kittyhawks of No. 76 Squadron attacked the Riam road area, and a further four aircraft of this squadron on the same day bombed and strafed the Tengoa River area. On this latter mission, the squadron lost its second pilot since arriving at Labuan. When the flight leader (Squadron Leader Wilson[2]) called up after the final run over the target, Warrant Officer George[3] failed to report. He was not seen to crash and searches by accompanying aircraft proved fruitless. Searches continued until 19th July, when a report was received from a guerilla party that he had died of injuries.

On 23rd July, a Mosquito and two Beaufighter aircraft of No. 86 (Attack) Wing arrived at Labuan from Morotai. It was intended that the aircraft of this wing would fly to Labuan on 25th June and operate there at the rate of 1,200 hours per squadron, per month. They were to carry out rocket, bombing and strafing sweeps. However, the move forward to Labuan was constantly delayed because the airstrip was not long enough for the operation of Mosquito aircraft. The Mosquito Squadron (No. 1, commanded by Wing Commander Little[4]) had been trained in low-level intruder work. The other squadron of the wing (No. 93, armed with Beaufighters, and commanded by Squadron Leader Gulliver[5]) did not leave Kingaroy, Queensland, until 31st July. According to the R.A.A.F. Command order to First T.A.F., the wing was to be operational at Labuan on Z plus fifteen days (25th June). But No. 93 Squadron arrived in time to take part in two operations before the war ended, and No. 1 Squadron in one.

The Beaufighters of No. 93, led by Gulliver, attacked watercraft at the mouth of the Tabuan River on 7th August. Gulliver scored hits with rockets on an 800-ton vessel. The vessel was hit with a further ten rockets

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[2] W Cdr D. L. Wilson, DFC, 260767. 23, 83 and 85 Sqns; comd 76 Sqn 1945. Cheesemaker; of Tweed River, NSW; b. Murwillumbah, NSW, 30 Nov 1916.

[3] W-O W. P. George, 414927; 76 Sqn. Clerk; of Brisbane; b. Brisbane, 6 Feb 1924. Died of injuries on 19 Jul 1945.

[4] W Cdr R. A. Little, DFC, 290491. 30 Sqn; comd 1 Sqn 1945. Sales manager; of South Perth, WA; b. Perth, 11 Jun 1916.

[5] Sqn Ldr D. K. H. Gulliver, 270655. 22, 23 and 21 Sqns; comd 93 Sqn 1945. Insurance inspector; of Amberley, Qld; b. Maryborough, Qld, 5 Mar 1917. Killed in aircraft accident 10 Dec 1945.

from following aircraft and was considered destroyed. Immediately on leaving the target area, however, it was noticed that one Beaufighter (Flying Officer Sims[6] and Farrant[7]) was missing from the formation. They had crashed over the target and were presumed lost, but the two men, after suffering great hardships, made their way back to Labuan, arriving after the war had ended. Sims reported that he had noticed his starboard motor had oil pouring from it after attacking the target. At 200 feet the motor stopped suddenly and the aircraft "squashed" into the jungle. Both pilot and navigator escaped with minor injuries and left the scene of the crash immediately and made their way towards the coast. On 11th August their strength was failing but they met friendly Chinese, and, with the help of a 17-year-old youth of mixed Chinese, Dyak and Filipino blood, Vincent Usurga, who spoke perfect English, they escaped down a river in a sampan. They were challenged by the Japanese, who, however, were put off by being told that the boat was going to sea to catch fish for them. The sampan reached the sea on 13th August and slowly made its way up the coast to Miri, reaching an outpost of the 9th Division at 10 a.m. on 20th August.

Four Kittyhawks of No. 82 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Schaaf,[8] attacked targets at Kuching on 8th August. They had a successful day on this mission when they attacked and destroyed three Oscars which were preparing to take off at the northern end of the airfield. The first Oscar had its engine running, while the other two were stationary, as if to turn into the airfield. The raid to Kuching was undertaken in spite of misgivings as to the range of the Kittyhawk. The target was 450 miles from base at Labuan and the aircraft were in the air for four hours and forty minutes, which was longer than the accepted duration of Kittyhawks.

On the same day seven Mosquitos of No. 1 Squadron strafed barges on the river at Kuching and barracks north of the river. During this operation, Squadron Leader Browne[9] and Flying Officer Gregson[1] crashed over the target and were killed.

For the support of the OBOE 6 Operation, Bostock ordered North-Western Area and Western Area to conduct long-range attacks against enemy air installations and other facilities in eastern Java and southern Celebes. In addition, North-Western Area was to continue with mine-laying operations and maintain the air blockade of the Macassar Strait, Celebes, Arafura, Timor, Banda and Flores Seas.

Night after night Catalinas took off to mine Surabaya harbour and the Banka Strait. Other Catalinas and the Liberators harassed Malang airfield in Java and the clusters of airfields in Celebes. Three Catalinas from

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[6] F-Lt V. J. Sims, 401396. 22, 75, 23 and 93 Sqns. Tailor's cutter; of Brunswick, Vic; b. Bendigo, Vic, 14 Jun 1917.

[7] F-O R. Farrant, 441616; 93 Sqn. Public servant; of Cohuna, Vic; b. Cohuna. 9 Sep 1920.

[8] W Cdr F. R. Schaaf, DFC, 2623. 3, 452 and 450 Sqns, 104 and 111 Fighter Sector HQ 1943-44; comd 82 Sqn 1945-47. Regular airman; of Pagewood, NSW; b. Tenterfield, NSW, 22 Jul 1915.

[9] Sqn Ldr R. D. Browne, 406025. 8 and 1 Sqns. Clerk; of Perth, WA; b. Claremont, WA, 2 Mar 1918. Killed in action 8 Aug 1945.

[1] F-O R. Gregson, 72527; 1 Sqn. Clerk; of Sydney; b. Gladesville, NSW, 12 Jun 1921. Killed in action 8 Aug 1945.

No. 20 Squadron mined Hong Kong harbour on the night of 1st June. No. 25 Squadron concentrated its night harassing of Malang.

The operations of the North-Western and Western Areas were continued in the same manner to support the final landing in the OBOE series at Balikpapan on 1st July. Between 21st and 30th June, No. 76 Wing alone flew forty sorties over eastern Java and southern Celebes to neutralise airfields within striking distance of Balikpapan, while the Allied convoys were on the way to the landing area. To assist in carrying out these raids, five Catalinas from No. 11 Squadron were temporarily attached to No. 76 Wing.

On 29th June, No. 25 Squadron attacked Java in daylight. Led by Wing Commander John Hampshire, nine Liberators from this squadron were sent to bomb Malang airfield. They took off from Corunna Downs in Western Australia at 8 a.m. and, in a tight box formation stepped down 200 feet between each element of three, bombed the airfield visually at 2.22 in the afternoon. The bomb pattern fell between the No. 1 Hangar and the barracks area at the southern side of the airfield, bracketing the main bomber strips. Interception by fighters was expected but no attempt was made and anti-aircraft fire, although encountered, burst well away from the Liberators.

The following night, Squadron Leader Rosevear led a formation of six Liberators from the same squadron to carry out harassing raids on Tanjong Perak airfield near Surabaya. On 22nd July this squadron again attacked Java in daylight, the target being the shipbuilding and harbour installations at Semarang (central Java). Hampshire again led the formation of nine Liberators which took off from Learmonth airfield. The first element of three bombed from 15,000 feet, hitting the wharf and shipbuilding area. The second element bombed in tight formation scoring excellent hits. The third, however, bombed independently. The first aircraft missed the target area, the bombs exploding in fishponds to the west. The second scored hits, while the third was forced off its intended run by the first aircraft, but also scored hits. Altogether, excellent coverage was observed and three large fires and numerous small ones were seen as they left the target area. The smoke became blacker each minute and the whole area was under a pall of smoke, visible from the southern coast of Java. This daylight mission was followed up the same evening by Catalinas of No. 76 Wing. Five of these aircraft operating from Darwin and refuelling at Broome, located the target at Semarang and bombed the dock area and shipbuilding yards. One warehouse was burned out and many other buildings damaged. A sixth Catalina failed to find the target and bombed a small township as an alternative.

By July the whole of No. 82 Wing had left North-Western Area and joined First Tactical Air Force. No. 79 Wing with its two squadrons of Mitchells (No. 2 and No. 18) had also left the area, leaving the command much depleted in strength. In addition there had been little if anything for the Spitfire pilots of No. 1 Wing to do and their morale had fallen. Not only were there no operations to carry out, but training had to be

reduced to a minimum because of the lack of Spitfires available for training purposes. However, Air Vice-Marshal Bostock informed Air Commodore Charlesworth that he proposed to move two of the Spitfire squadrons to Borneo, leaving only one at Darwin for local air defence. It was not expected that the fighter squadrons going forward under this scheme were likely to obtain air combat experience because of the scarcity of enemy fighters. However, they would be surrounded by cut-off enemy, and it would be possible to employ them in action as "attack" aircraft.

To replace No. 82 Wing at North-Western Area, Bostock was planning to bring forward another heavy bomber wing (No. 85) which had just been formed. This wing would have two newly-formed Liberator squadrons under command (Nos. 12 and 99), and, together with No. 82 Wing, would be assigned the task of neutralising all enemy bases in the Netherlands East Indies. No. 82 Wing was to be based eventually at Balikpapan and General Kenney had promised Lord Louis Mountbatten that the Australian Liberator squadrons would be made available to him to aid the operation in South-East Asia Command to recapture Singapore. Mountbatten conferred with MacArthur at Manila and Kenney, who was present, recounted in his *General Kenney Reports* the promise he made of Australian air support.[2] He said: "Mountbatten wanted some bombing assistance at that time, if we had any to spare. MacArthur asked me what I could do. I said the Australians had three squadrons of B-24s which would be able to operate from the Borneo fields by that time, and just before the date of the Singapore landing I could send down a couple of groups of B-24s [eight squadrons] from the Far East Air Forces for two or three days' final preparation work."

By the end of June, First T.A.F. had grown to such an extent that its manpower total was 21,893. Another 3,134 men joined the command during July, most of these being from No. 82 Wing. However, by the end of July, some 4,381 had left the command, leaving a net total of 20,646 men. Some 700 of those who left the command in July were men who had completed their tour of duty in the tropics. Numbers in this category had shown a marked increase over May and June.

The forward moves of First T.A.F. from Noemfoor Island to Morotai and then on to Tarakan and Labuan had resulted in a stringing out of units and personnel. Other contemplated moves would further disperse the command. Lines of communication with the mainland were long and the administrative units required to maintain them, and the work of garrisoning the newly-occupied areas in which enemy forces remained beyond the defence perimeters, led to a constant expansion of the command so that it had become unwieldy and lacking in essential mobility. In theory the command was a "mobile striking force" and it was intended that it should be used as such. Accordingly, it had to be freed of non-essential elements and streamlined as much as possible.

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[2] p. 564.

In order to free the force of its "administrative tail" and the task of carrying out garrison operations, a new static organisation was proposed. It would be formed out of elements of Northern Command and First Tactical Air Force and was to be known as No. 11 Group. The Government agreed to the proposal and the new group took over administrative control of all units on Morotai as from 30th July 1945. Its commander was Air Commodore Brownell, who had been serving as Air Officer Commanding, Western Area. Group Captain Lush[3] was appointed Senior Air Staff Officer and Group Captain Curnow,[4] Staff Officer Administration.

The initial sphere of responsibility of No. 11 Group was to include all Dutch territory north of latitude 7 degrees south and east of longitude 108 degrees east, British North Borneo and Sarawak. Air bases to be garrisoned immediately were Hollandia, Biak, Middleburg, Morotai, Labuan and Tarakan. Within its area the new group had the following responsibilities:

(*a*) Local air defence duties and sea lane protection.
(*b*) Support of adjacent formations and offensive operations against enemy targets within range.
(*c*) Line of communication duties.

However, the group was formed too late to take over all its responsibilities before the war ended. It had, however, taken over operational control of No. 79 (Spitfire) Squadron and had directed operations of No. 82 Wing Liberators unofficially just before the end.

Initially, No. 11 Group was to consist of the following units:

No. 11 Group Headquarters
No. 79 Squadron
No. 452 Squadron
No. 457 Squadron
No. 120 Squadron.

Operating in twos, threes and fours, Spitfires of No. 79 Squadron were out almost every day over Halmahera, throughout June, carrying out a total of 290 sorties. Small enemy watercraft were the main targets. Barges, small ships, even canoes and prahus were strafed in the daily sweeps. On 11th June, ten Spitfires, led by Squadron Leader Susans,[5] attacked a concentration of prahus at Obit Island off southern Halmahera. The Spitfires dropped bombs and strafed the area thoroughly.

Liberators of the R.A.A.F. and the Thirteenth Air Force Bomber Command joined the Spitfires in July and August in their attacks on Halmahera, and occasionally Beaufighters also joined in.

On 30th July, No. 11 Group took over No. 80 Wing Headquarters which ceased to function, most of its personnel being absorbed into the

[3] Gp Capt J. F. Lush, 254. 10 Sqn; comd 32 Sqn 1943; SO, Operations, North-Western Area 1943-44, RAAF Cmd 1944-45; SASO 11 Gp 1945. Regular air force offr; of Hawthorn, Vic; b. Hawthorn, 17 Sep 1915.

[4] Gp Capt T. C. Curnow, 59. Comd 23 Sqn 1939, 2 EFTS 1939-40, 5 EFTS 1940-41, 224 Sqn RAF 1941-42; SASO North-Eastern Area 1943; comd 5 SFTS 1943-45; SASO 11 Gp 1945. Regular air force offr; of Brisbane; b. Ballarat, Vic, 7 Aug 1911.

[5] W Cdr R. T. Susans, DSO, DFC, 280760. 3 Sqn; comd 79 Sqn 1945; 80 Wing. Salesman; of Manly, NSW; b. Manly, 25 Feb 1917.

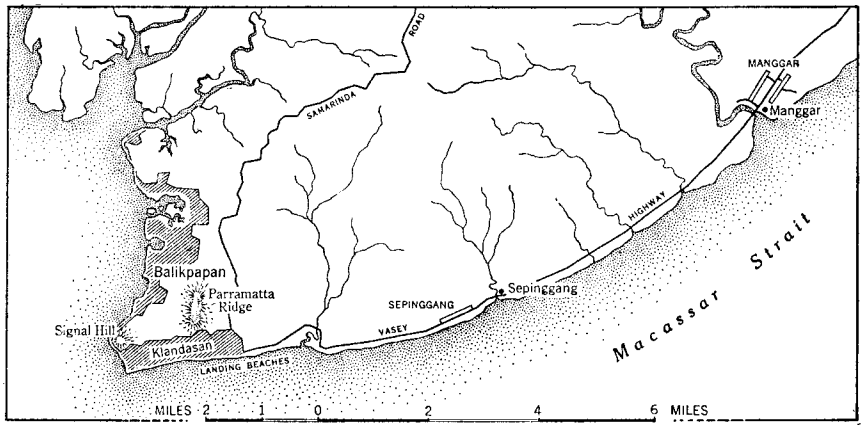
newly-formed group. That day No. 79 Squadron was ordered to carry out a sweep over Halmahera. Four Spitfires from the squadron destroyed an enemy bomber on Lolobata airfield. This success was followed up the day after when another bomber was destroyed at the same airfield. It was later learned that nine enemy fighters were located in a camouflaged revetment south of the dispersal area and were being maintained by about 600 Japanese quartered in the vicinity. A big raid was therefore planned. On 4th August, twelve Liberators of the Thirteenth Air Force, in cooperation with six Spitfires of No. 79 Squadron, attacked the area again. The Liberators dropped 175 general-purpose bombs over the target. However, no sign of the enemy planes was seen during the attack. The Spitfire squadron continued daily strikes in the Halmahera area until, on 14th August, operations were terminated by R.A.A.F. Command signals.

## CHAPTER 29

# BALIKPAPAN

OIL-RICH Balikpapan on the east coast was the next point in Borneo to be seized from the Japanese. The plan was to land there, near the built-up area, on 1st July—three weeks after the Labuan-Brunei landing and two months after the invasion of Tarakan. Once more First T.A.F. was to take part in the operation, this time in support of the 7th Australian Division, which was to be the assault force.

Balikpapan had been one of the enemy's main sources of aviation fuel. For that reason General Kenney had long been anxious to attack it. Earlier in the war he had pleaded for Superfortress bombers, which, he said, operating from Darwin, would be able to reach Balikpapan in comfort and destroy this oil-producing target. Kenney, however, did not get the Superfortresses. But in September 1944, when South-West Pacific Area forces had seized Morotai, he used this island as an advanced fighter base from which his fighters staged to escort some 280 Liberators in a series of five major attacks which did considerable damage to the installations at Balikpapan. These five raids took place between 30th September and 18th October, 1944, and were merely the beginning of a series of raids of ever-increasing intensity. With the invasion of Balikpapan now to be mounted, R.A.A.F. Command was planning further bombardments of considerable strength.




Before the war, Balikpapan had been the second-largest refining and exporting centre of petroleum in the Far East, with an annual output of 18,000,000 barrels. The oil installations were partly destroyed by the Dutch in January 1942, before they evacuated Borneo. Under the Japanese, however, reconstruction of the oil industry there had been

vigorously conducted, and by 1943 many of the refining units were working again, although at reduced capacities. Balikpapan also had excellent port facilities, and operational airfields at Manggar and Sepinggang. From these airfields, Java and Celebes were within easy bomber range.

Balikpapan, with a population of about 30,000, was a well-developed town flanked to landward by tropical rain forest. The hills come close to the water, leaving only about 400 yards between the foothills and the shore of Macassar Strait.

The General Headquarters order for the Balikpapan operation was issued on 23rd May 1945, and read:

> Forces of the South-West Pacific will seize and occupy the Balikpapan, Borneo, area, establish naval, air and logistic facilities and conserve petroleum producing and processing installations therein. . . .

Task Group 78.2 was to provide the naval force, and neutralisation of hostile ground, naval and air forces was allotted to Allied Air Forces, and delegated by General Kenney to Air Vice-Marshal Bostock.

In spite of heavy Allied bombing and the fact that Balikpapan was now cut off from the Japanese homeland, the Japanese continued to operate the oilfields and to resist, both with fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft fire, the attacks by Kenney's squadrons. There were estimated to be perhaps 6,000 Japanese troops in the area and Kenney feared that if they turned their anti-aircraft guns against surface targets during the invasion there they might inflict heavy casualties. He therefore told General MacArthur that he wanted to smother the whole of the Balikpapan defence system and would make the whole of Far East Air Force available if necessary. MacArthur agreed.[1] Kenney's estimate was that it would be necessary to drop about 3,000 tons of bombs on Balikpapan to knock out all the guns. He told General Wurtsmith to confer with Air Vice-Marshal Bostock on the bombing plan.

Enemy air strength remaining in the Netherlands East Indies was estimated at not more than seventeen fighters, seventeen bombers and a number of float-planes. It was therefore assumed that the Japanese would be incapable of any sustained or large-scale air opposition during the invasion of Balikpapan. It was likely that air reaction would be limited to sporadic dawn and dusk raids, mostly on shipping and with small numbers of aircraft.

The 7th Division was to go ashore near the built-up area of Balikpapan and this made necessary the "taking out" of the buildings near the beach so as to prevent the enemy using them as protection while firing on the landing forces. It was assumed that the enemy would try to use burning oil for defence during the landing operations, and therefore all oil tanks had to be destroyed by air attack.

R.A.A.F. Command was to establish at Balikpapan within six days of the landing one fighter wing (three squadrons of Kittyhawks) and an air-sea rescue flight of Catalinas. As soon as practicable thereafter the

[1] G. C. Kenney, *General Kenney Reports*, p. 556.

R.A.A.F. would establish at Balikpapan one medium-bomber wing (two squadrons of Mitchells) and one heavy-bomber wing (three squadrons of Liberators).

It was desirable that the anti-aircraft positions at Balikpapan should be destroyed before 15th June, on which date minesweeping operations were to begin. Attacks on these guns were given top priority because some of them could be turned on the minesweepers. Furthermore, if they remained in action they would prevent aircraft from carrying out low-level attacks in support of the minesweepers. For the first fifteen days of June the weather was bad and forced several large formations of bombers sent to attack these guns to turn their attacks against alternative targets. The Australian Liberators were sent to bomb Balikpapan on 12th June but the weather forced them to bomb an alternative target instead. The formation split up and went in singly to drop fragmentation bombs, all of which landed on the target area. The next day, however, thirty-three American Liberators bombed the anti-aircraft defences at Balikpapan town and at Sepinggang airfield.

In addition to three Liberator squadrons (Nos. 21, 23 and 24) and other Liberators of North-Western Area and Western Area, Bostock planned to use Beaufighters of No. 77 Wing and Kittyhawks of No. 78 Wing, reinforced by two squadrons from No. 81 Wing, in support of the operation. The Beaufighter wing was to provide two aircraft daily to strike the OBOE 2 area and the Kittyhawks were to be on air alert over the objective area and to provide air cover for the convoys moving in from Morotai. The plan was that, with the exception of the Liberators, all these aircraft would operate from Tarakan airfield, but the date on which they were to assume their duties (8th June) came and passed without the airfield there being brought to a fit state for use.

The delay over the Tarakan airfield, forced a recasting of the plan at short notice. The Thirteenth Air Force, using Lightnings from Sanga Sanga, was called on to provide fighter cover, instead of First Tactical Air Force; and the naval task force commander asked for, and was given, three American escort carriers armed with fighter aircraft. The navy was unwilling to rely solely on the Lightnings, on the ground that bad weather between Sanga Sanga and Balikpapan might prevent them getting through to the target area. The loss of the use of Tarakan airfield for the operation also forced Bostock to use Liberator aircraft operating from Morotai, Samar and Palawan, for direct air support of the assault. The use of this type of bomber, operating from bases more than 700 miles away, was unique, but there was no alternative. Altogether, Bostock had forty squadrons at his disposal for the period just before and during the landing, and, of these, twenty-five were of heavy bombers, totalling 300 aircraft.

While aircraft of No. 82 Wing pounded Balikpapan from the air, the main body of this wing had left the Northern Territory in the troopship *Louis Arguello* and was en route to Morotai. After the Balikpapan landing they were to move into the airstrips there and prepare for operations over the Netherlands East Indies.

On 15th June, twelve Australian Liberators were sent to bomb anti-aircraft positions at Balikpapan, but only six reached the target and many of the bombs from these six aircraft fell harmlessly into the sea. Between 19th and 25th June, the Australian Liberators dropped some 119 tons of bombs in and round Balikpapan. They succeeded in destroying oil installations and an anti-aircraft position and started large fires. On 27th June a total of 123 Liberators (six of them from No. 82 Wing) and seventy-three Mitchells bombed Balikpapan in a series of attacks. As assault day approached the weight of attack was shifted to the coastal defences. These defences were strong because the Japanese had regarded Balikpapan as a vital possession.

By the end of June, the first aircraft (apart from Austers) had landed on the Tarakan airfield which had at last become operational. Wing Commander Read, in a Beaufighter, was the first to land—at 10 a.m. on 28th June. He was followed by two more Beaufighters and nine Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron. A further three Beaufighters and eleven Kittyhawks arrived in the afternoon, but because of bad weather between Morotai and Tarakan were practically all out of fuel. One of the Beaufighters, completely out of fuel, crash-landed off the runway and a Kittyhawk landed too far up and overran the airstrip. Another came down in the sea but the pilot was rescued.

No. 78 Wing, with Nos. 75, 78, 80 and 452 Squadrons under its control, now began flying from Tarakan in support of the Balikpapan operation. The first mission was an attack by sixteen Kittyhawks and four Spitfires against Laban and Mensalung on 30th June. It was found impossible, however, to operate Beaufighters from the Tarakan strip, and they were withdrawn to Morotai, and took little further part in the war.

Dawn came off Balikpapan on 1st July with a red glow visible to the thousands of men who watched from an armada of 200 ships nearing the target area. It was General MacArthur's biggest amphibious operation since the landing at Lingayen in January. The thunder of guns from American, Australian and Dutch warships and the drone of heavy bombers overhead announced the beginning of operations. Just before the landing, ten squadrons of Liberators, from the Fifth and Thirteenth Air Forces and First Tactical Air Force, were marshalled over Balikpapan in a forty-minute air bombardment of areas near the landing beaches.

The Liberators from the Thirteenth bombed first. Twenty-four of them in formation dropped fifty tons of demolition bombs on the beach defences. Then came the Australian Liberators. They bombed between 8.10 and 8.24 a.m., just before the landing of the 7th Division. Twenty Australian Liberators took part (seven each from Nos. 21 and 24 Squadrons and six from No. 23), and, led by Squadron Leader I. O. Black, they bombed from a height of between 8,000 and 6,900 feet, dropping a total of more than two hundred 500-lb bombs. Then came Liberators of No. 90 and No. 380 Groups of the Fifth Air Force. Thirty-eight of these aircraft dropped about 70 tons of bombs on priority areas near the beaches. A few minutes later Mitchells laid a smoke curtain along the rear of the

invasion beaches, covering the amphibious craft which were now racing towards the enemy across the water.

From their Liberators the crews saw the terrible hammering, not only from the air bombardment but from the shells and rockets fired into the inferno by the combined naval forces. The shoreline was blanketed with dense smoke through which tongues of flame were darting. The surface of the sea was covered with small landing craft manoeuvring as they prepared to go in, while rocket ships went into action in sweeps along the 2,000-yard landing beach. After two hours of this bombardment, the assault waves moved in towards the shore. In spite of the intense preparation, however, the enemy was still capable of resistance, although it was weak. They opened up with some ragged artillery, mortar and small arms fire. Then at 8.55 a.m. the Australian troops started to jump off the ramps of their landing craft on to the beach. So effectively had the air and naval bombardment done its work that seventeen assault waves landed without a casualty.

A scene of indescribable ruin greeted the infantrymen as they began to push inland. The oil storage tanks were almost completely destroyed, the refinery and cracking plant devastated, and large areas of houses and shops razed. A total of 441 barracks, warehouses and residential buildings were destroyed in the southern part of the town alone. There were acres of twisted steel framework. Buildings which had not been flattened were burned out, blackened and splintered. Railway tracks were torn up and oil towers were lying horizontal. The troops saw ample evidence of the strong defences the Japanese had built. There were concrete pits, strong-posts and shelters along the beach front, but the bombardment had forced the Japanese to abandon them and withdraw inland to more tenable positions.

The Dutch claimed that the bombardment at Balikpapan was carried out with excessive vigour and the damage was far greater than necessary. However, the aim had always been to ensure that the pre-assault air bombardment would enable the troops to go ashore without opposition and this had largely been achieved. Not only General Kenney but Generals Morshead and Milford[2] and Air Vice-Marshal Bostock expressed the view that air and naval bombardment at Balikpapan must be as heavy as possible in order to reduce casualties. The R.A.A.F. Command report on the operation pointed out that the landing was made with slight casualties against positions which could have been very effectively defended had it not been for the damage inflicted by air action. "Damage incidental to achieving this result can only be regarded as completely justified," states the R.A.A.F. Command Report.

After the landing some of the enemy coastal defence batteries could still fire. Some seventeen out of twenty-eight known 90-mm gun positions were knocked out, but the remainder were manned and used by the enemy

[2] Maj-Gen E. J. Milford, CB, CBE, DSO, VX12014. (1st AIF: Maj 4 AFA Bde.) CRA 7 Div 1940; MGO AHQ 1941-42; GOC 5 Div 1942-44, 7 Div 1944-45. Regular soldier; b. Armadale, Vic, 10 Dec 1894.

even after many heavy bomb strikes. They proved difficult to knock out as direct hits were hard to get on well-prepared concrete and earth emplacements. Continual shelling by naval units was necessary to keep these batteries silent.

Over the beach-head, an R.A.A.F. Liberator from No. 24 Squadron, captained by Wing Commander Davies[3], reported progress to the command ship U.S.S. *Wasatch*. In addition, the Liberator strafed a retreating enemy transport column. Davies' aircraft was fired on by anti-aircraft guns which the initial bombardment had failed to knock out. Anti-aircraft guns were active for days after the landing and it appeared that some of these weapons were moved from their original positions and set up in new ones along the Samarinda road after the landing had begun.

In the afternoon of assault day, the relieving air observation aircraft (another Liberator of No. 24 Squadron, captained by Group Captain McLean, the newly-appointed commanding officer of No. 82 Wing) was hit by anti-aircraft fire, badly damaged, and had to be set down in the sea. Some of the crew had managed to parachute into the sea and were picked up by surface craft, but the others, including McLean, were lost.

Fifteen minutes after the landing the Australian soldiers had penetrated 800 yards inland from the beach, thus securing the beach-head area. The 2/10th Battalion then swung to the west to attack Parramatta Ridge, a 300-foot-high feature running 1,500 yards due north—from which the enemy could command the entire Klandasan beach. The 2/10th launched attacks with Matilda tanks, artillery and heavy mortar support, and by 2.15 p.m., in spite of determined enemy opposition, had taken the ridge.

There were many calls from the army for air support during assault day. The requests were being received by R.A.A.F. air liaison and support parties which went ashore with the infantry and relayed the requests to the headquarters ships which would then call in the supporting aircraft (mainly Liberators of the Thirteenth Air Force) to attack the target indicated.

On the afternoon of the assault day Major-General Milford, commanding the 7th Division, called for an air strike for 4 p.m. He wanted the task done by dive bombers of the American Navy from the three escort carriers supporting the landing. There was a conference between Morshead, Milford, Bostock and Rear-Admiral A. G. Noble of the American 7th Amphibious Force, during which Milford urged the use of naval aircraft. Bostock opposed the use of naval aircraft, however, because, he said, the pilots did not know the terrain and because there were differences between naval- and army-support procedures. However, the Liberators which were providing close support would all have to leave for base at 4 p.m. The American Navy was keen to help so Milford arranged for them to carry out a strike. The navy planes were briefed, but disregarded their instructions and bombed into the 2/10th Battalion area, causing casualties to the troops.

[3] Gp Capt A. E. L. Davies, 151. Area Sigs Offr Western Area HQ 1941-42, North-West Area 1943; 24 Sqn. Regular air force offr; of Penrith, NSW; b. Ngakawau, NZ, 22 Apr 1915.

At the end of assault day the Australians had advanced 2,000 yards and casualties amounted to 22 killed and 74 wounded. That night the Japanese sent infiltrating parties to counter-attack. Star shells illuminated the battle areas, revealing the Japanese. They clashed with Australian patrols, and at dawn next day more than 300 Japanese dead lay scattered about Parramatta Ridge.

The 2/14th Battalion advanced rapidly along Vasey Highway on 2nd July, enveloping Sepinggang airfield by 11 a.m. The airstrip was soon secured. It was badly cratered but work began immediately to repair it.

At 12.45 p.m. a Liberator of No. 24 Squadron captained by Flight Lieutenant Beattie[4] was shot down by light anti-aircraft fire and crashed out of control in enemy territory. In addition to the crew, Captain Spry,[5] an army observation officer, was lost. The Liberator on observation duties was flying at less than 1,000 feet at the time it was hit. This squadron lost another Liberator on air observation duties three days later. Squadron Leader Redman[6] was the captain and he had a crew of ten R.A.A.F. airmen and also carried Captain Westgarth,[7] an army observation officer. At 10 o'clock in the morning, while flying at a height of 200 feet two miles north of Sepinggang airfield, No. 3 engine was seen to catch fire after being hit by light enemy anti-aircraft fire, and the aircraft then exploded in mid-air. None of the crew was seen to escape by parachute and a second aircraft directed to the scene of the crash saw the wreckage burning furiously on the ground. An army patrol got to within 150 yards of the wreckage, but was unable to penetrate farther because of enemy resistance.

Auster aircraft had been taken ashore on assault day, but the temporary landing field chosen for their use was unsuitable and it was decided to wait until Sepinggang airfield was ready. It was ready by midday on 3rd July and the first Auster took off at 1 p.m. on that day.

The First T.A.F. units were late getting ashore at Balikpapan, with the result that they were twenty-four hours behind their schedule. However, this turned out to be no misfortune. It would have been impossible to move the heavy equipment along Vasey Highway to Sepinggang airfield because the highway was in a poor state with all its bridges, gutters and culverts destroyed. The squadrons of No. 61 Airfield Construction Wing were due to land on 4th July to carry out works projects at Balikpapan, but again, because of the condition of Vasey highway, landing was delayed and work began instead on 6th July. The airfield, although cratered in the centre, was good at the ends, and it looked as though it would be ready for use within about ten days of the landing. Meanwhile, the 7th Division followed up its success in taking Sepinggang by capturing the

[4] F-Lt R. Mc. Beattie, DFM, 404228. 458, 38 and 24 Sqns. Clerk; of Gympie, Qld; b. Brisbane, 20 Aug 1920. Killed in action 2 Jul 1945.

[5] Capt H. W. Spry, VX14362. 2/8 Fd Regt; Army observation offr, attached 24 Sqn. Salesman; of Toorak, Vic; b. Canterbury, Vic, 8 Sep 1917. Killed in action 2 Jul 1945.

[6] Sqn Ldr J. R. W. Redman, 402395. 612 Sqn RAF, 203 Gp and 24 Sqn. Clerk; of Glebe, NSW; b. Sydney, 10 Jul 1914. Killed in action 5 Jul 1945.

[7] Capt B. D. Westgarth. 2/5 Fd Regt; Army observation offr, attached 24 Sqn. Judge's associate; of Darling Point, NSW; b. Blayney, NSW, 1 Jan 1917. Killed in action 5 Jul 1945.

residential district of Klandasan. The entire Klandasan peninsula, including Signal Hill and the town of Balikpapan itself, had been taken by the end of the third day. Total army casualties by the fifth day amounted to 65 killed and some 350 wounded.

Balikpapan presented an extraordinary sight of ruin. It seemed that the work of reconstruction would take years. An observer wrote: "The whole place has suffered a terrific hammering, hardly a building of any description is left standing. Bomb craters, shell holes, wreckage is everywhere visible. Everything is waterlogged and soaked with oil. The oil pipes leading to the refineries have been blown up either by the bombers or by the Japanese. Trucks, jeeps and weapon carriers are all flat-out going somewhere on the roughest road in history."

During July the squadrons of No. 82 Wing at Morotai and of No. 78 Wing at Tarakan, flew a heavy program of missions over Celebes and Borneo. Indirectly these missions supported the Balikpapan operation. The Liberators concentrated on Celebes, bombing Macassar on 6th July, and Ambesia on the 7th. On 10th July, six Liberators led by Flight Lieutenant Gillespie,[8] bombed Tabanio, near Bandjermasin, landing fifty-four bombs on the airfield. They reported, however, that the runway had been out of order before they bombed the airstrip.

No. 78 Wing divided its attention during July between strikes against enemy concentrations in north-east Borneo, especially Sandakan, and close support for the 7th Division at Balikpapan. To the Thirteenth Air Force, however, fell the major burden at Balikpapan. Using Liberators, Mitchells and Lightnings, they kept up a constant offensive against the Japanese round Balikpapan and north and south of the battle area.

On 2nd July, twenty-four Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron and Spitfires of No. 452 Squadron, operating out of Tarakan, carried out strikes on Kalabakan and Simalumong. At Simalumong, hits were scored. The Spitfires made eight strafing passes and just after finishing one of these, Flight Lieutenant Proctor[9] of No. 452 Squadron crashed and was killed. In the mission on this day to Kalabakan, Squadron Leader Kinninmont dived so low in a strafing pass that his aircraft hit the tops of coconut trees, damaging both mainplanes of the aircraft, but he succeeded in flying his Kittyhawk back to Tarakan, where he took to his parachute over the sea and was rescued by a crash boat from the water.

On 7th July, three missions of Kittyhawks set out from Tarakan, but all of them failed to reach the target because of the weather. The pilots were endangered by the difficult weather, and Pilot Officer Gilbert[1] was forced to bale out when his aircraft spun. He was seen to parachute from his aircraft and land safely, but he died later while a prisoner in Japanese hands.

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[8] F-Lt A. F. Gillespie, 402116. 206 and 200 Sqns RAF; 21 Sqn; and 531 Sqn USAAF. Commercial pilot; of Rose Bay, NSW; b. Sydney, 21 Jun 1917.

[9] F-Lt A. J. Proctor, 418174; 452 Sqn. Clerk; of Middle Park, Vic; b. Melbourne, 2 Sep 1921. Killed in action 2 July 1945.

[1] P-O M. A. J. Gilbert; 75 Sqn. Clerk; of Thebarton, SA; b. Hindmarsh, SA, 26 Jun 1925. Died while prisoner of war 24 Jul 1945.

On 9th July, twelve more Spitfires of No. 452 Squadron arrived at Tarakan from Morotai, bringing the unit up to full strength. The following day four Spitfires and eight Kittyhawks were assigned to a bombing and strafing attack on Tawao in conjunction with American PT boats. They destroyed two bridges and burned huts in the area. Another pilot of No. 452 Squadron (Flight Lieutenant Cullen[2]) was missing from this strike. He was last seen recovering from a dive-bombing run. Two days later, when dive-bombing the same target, Squadron Leader Barclay[3] was hit by anti-aircraft fire but although he had to abandon his damaged aircraft, he succeeded in parachuting safely into the sea and was later picked up by a friendly launch.

By 13th July, a 3,000-foot-long runway had been prepared for use at Sepinggang and on 15th July, an American naval Catalina aircraft, followed by flights of No. 452 Squadron led by Barclay, landed on the airfield. The original planning for the Balikpapan operation called for the Spitfires to be based at Sepinggang by 7th July and remain there until relieved by No. 54 Squadron, which was to be brought in from Darwin. However, the airstrip had not been made ready by that time. No. 452 Squadron flew its first missions from Sepinggang on 15th July, when its Spitfires strafed an area where dug-in Japanese were holding up army patrols.

Back at Tarakan the planes of No. 80 Squadron had moved in from Morotai and became operational on the afternoon of 13th July. Next day, four Kittyhawks from this squadron carried out an armed reconnaissance of Redeb. On 19th July, eight Kittyhawks from No. 75 Squadron, eight from No. 80 Squadron and fifteen Spitfires from No. 452 Squadron flew sorties in support of the ground forces in the Balikpapan area. The Spitfires swept the waterways and rivers of upper Balikpapan Bay and their score at the end of the day was eleven barges burned or sunk. Flight Lieutenant Blumer[4] attacked a barge on which between fifteen and twenty Japanese were being carried. His first burst at this target set off an explosion, followed by smoke and flames through which Blumer's aircraft passed. His arm was singed and the paint on his airscrew was scorched.

The Kittyhawks of No. 75 Squadron bombed a barracks area at Balikpapan and after finishing their mission, landed and refuelled at Sepinggang before returning to Tarakan.

The Spitfire squadron at Balikpapan continued its successful operations when four aircraft were sent out on 22nd July to attack motor transport. They destroyed four vehicles and damaged another seven.

Balikpapan was visited on the night of 22nd July by a single-engined enemy aircraft which seemed to be on a reconnaissance mission, preparatory to a raid; and, on the night of the 24th, between 8 o'clock and 10

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[2] F-Lt N. J. Cullen, 406070. 127, 457 and 452 Sqns. Miner; of North Perth, WA; b. Capel, WA, 23 Jul 1916. Killed in action 10 Jul 1945.

[3] Sqn Ldr K. M. Barclay, DFC, 407662. 79 and 66 Sqns RAF; comd 453 Sqn 1943; 457 Sqn; comd 452 Sqn 1945. Clerk; of Peterborough, SA; b. Gladstone, SA, 27 Sep 1920.

[4] F-Lt A. G. B. Blumer, DFC, 411735. 453 Sqn, 601 Sqn RAF, 452 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Croydon, NSW; b. Gosford, NSW, 5 May 1922.

o'clock twin-engined aircraft came over and dropped twenty-five bombs. This was the biggest air attack made by the enemy since the beginning of the Borneo campaign. Shrapnel damaged the mainplane of an R.A.A.F. Catalina during the raid.

The First T.A.F's 110th Mobile Fighter Control Unit picked up the approach of the enemy planes on its radar screens. Early in the morning the controller ordered a stand-by Spitfire aircraft (piloted by Flight Lieutenant King[5]) to take off and intercept. A flarepath was ordered and King became airborne and climbed to 18,000 feet. At 3.30 a.m. he saw an enemy aircraft and attacked without result, almost colliding with it. The enemy aircraft returned the fire, but without scoring hits on King's Spitfire. Shortly afterwards King saw the twin exhausts of another aircraft. He attacked immediately and shot it down in flames. King was then out of fuel and had to return to base where he "pancaked" his aircraft on the airfield. Another Spitfire, piloted by Flight Lieutenant Collyer, was sent up but made no contact with enemy aircraft.

It was thought likely that the Japanese would continue to raid Borneo on a moderate scale. It was believed that this raid was carried out by aircraft based on Java, plus several from Singapore, probably staging through the Bandjermasin airfield in south Borneo. There were fifty-five operational aircraft on the three airfields at Singapore, but because of the threat to Singapore from the north, it was not thought likely that any sizeable part of this strength would be staged south to attack Balikpapan.

On 23rd July, twelve Kittyhawks (four each from Nos. 75, 78 and 80 Squadrons) were ordered to attack the Bandjermasin fields to eliminate them as staging bases. The aircraft flew from Tarakan to Sepinggang for briefing. Six of the Kittyhawks were ordered to attack Ulin and six Tabanio. They shot up the hangars, huts and control tower at Ulin and reported that the Tabanio airstrips were unserviceable. Next day, eight Kittyhawks, led by Squadron Leader Sudlow,[6] again bombed Ulin airfield, landing all their bombs on the intersection of No. 3 runway. They then strafed the Ulin-Bandjermasin road, hitting a steam-roller. In the afternoon Kittyhawks, led by Flight Lieutenant Hill,[7] were sent on armed reconnaissance to Bandjermasin, but bad weather prevented them reaching the target area.

Limbung airfield across Macassar Strait from Bandjermasin was also bombed by six Liberators of No. 82 Wing, operating from Morotai. This wing lost a Liberator near Tomohon on 27th July, and another Liberator was lost four days later after another mission to Celebes, making a total of five for the month. All told forty-eight R.A.A.F. aircrew, as well as a number of army personnel, had lost their lives.

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[5] F-Lt J. C. King, 401823. 41 Sqn RAF and 452 Sqn. Bank clerk; of Geelong, Vic; b. St Arnaud, Vic, 18 Mar 1922.

[6] Sqn Ldr R. P. Sudlow, 406083. 25 and 77 Sqns; comd 78 Sqn 1944-45. Shipping clerk; of Claremont, WA; b. Peppermint Grove, WA, 31 Jan 1918.

[7] F-Lt J. D. Hill, 407792. 123, 80 and 127 Sqns RAF, and 80 Sqn RAAF. Student; of West Beach, SA; b. Rose Park, SA, 3 Feb 1919.

The Kittyhawks and Spitfires of First T.A.F. flew no fewer than 877 sorties during July from Tarakan and Sepinggang. In North Borneo they laid on a heavy series of attacks against Sandakan. This town was practically wiped out, and the Japanese in the town and near-by areas were harried daily by bombing and machine-gun fire. The general tactical plan in Borneo was to prevent the enemy consolidating positions or concentrating in any one area. First T.A.F. aircraft were used to attack any sign of concentration. Attacks were made on stores areas, keeping the enemy on the move, preventing him from growing food supplies and driving him into the jungle where he became a prey to Dyaks, who, generally speaking, were friendly to the Allies.

This policy was continued in August until the war ended. Little anti-aircraft fire was encountered except at Samarinda, where intense fire brought down Pilot Officer Quinn,[8] of No. 80 Squadron, on 9th August. Hit by the ground fire, Quinn attempted to crash-land, but struck an oilfield pumping plant, causing his aircraft to crash and burst into flames. Quinn was one of the last of the R.A.A.F. to die in action in Borneo. The activity both of the R.A.A.F. and of the 7th and 9th Divisions eased during August. Operations were cut down because, with the expected end of hostilities, there was no further point in risking lives. That was the situation when, on 14th August, First Tactical Air Force sent out its message warning squadrons of the coming end to the long struggle:

SECRET: OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS AGAINST ENEMY CITIES LAND COMMUNICATIONS AND OTHER LAND TARGETS EXCEPT DIRECT SUPPORT FOR ALLIED GROUND FORCES IN CONTACT WITH THE ENEMY WILL CEASE UNTIL FURTHER ORDERS. RECONNAISSANCE AND PHOTO MISSIONS ANTI SHIPPING STRIKES AND FIGHTER ATTACKS AGAINST AIRBORNE ENEMY AEROPLANES WILL CONTINUE. FORCES CHARGED WITH AIR DEFENCE WILL BE ESPECIALLY ALERT.

The warning to air defences to be on the alert was to guard against the possibility that a few Japanese airmen would make suicide attacks rather than surrender; but nothing happened. The Japanese loyally obeyed the order of their Emperor.

[8] P-O E. Quinn, 417413; 80 Sqn. Farmer; of Forreston, SA; b. Gumeracha, SA, 17 Sep 1922. Killed in action 9 Aug 1945.

## CHAPTER 30

# THE WAR ENDS

ON the 6th August 1945 an American B-29 bomber dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima in southern Japan, destroying nearly all the built-up area of the city and killing some 60,000 people. On the 8th Russia informed Japan that she would declare war next day. A second atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki on the 9th August, and the following day Tokyo Radio could be heard quoting a report that Japan was willing to surrender.

There had been only two paths the Japanese could take. One was unconditional surrender and the other amounted virtually to self-imposed destruction. Many military authorities have been impressed by the fact that the Japanese entered the war with no over-all strategic plan to destroy the military power of the United States and Britain. The Japanese merely hoped, after seizing areas which they considered vital, that the counter-offensive would be made either impossible or so difficult that the British and Americans would finally make a peace which would leave them with considerable gains.

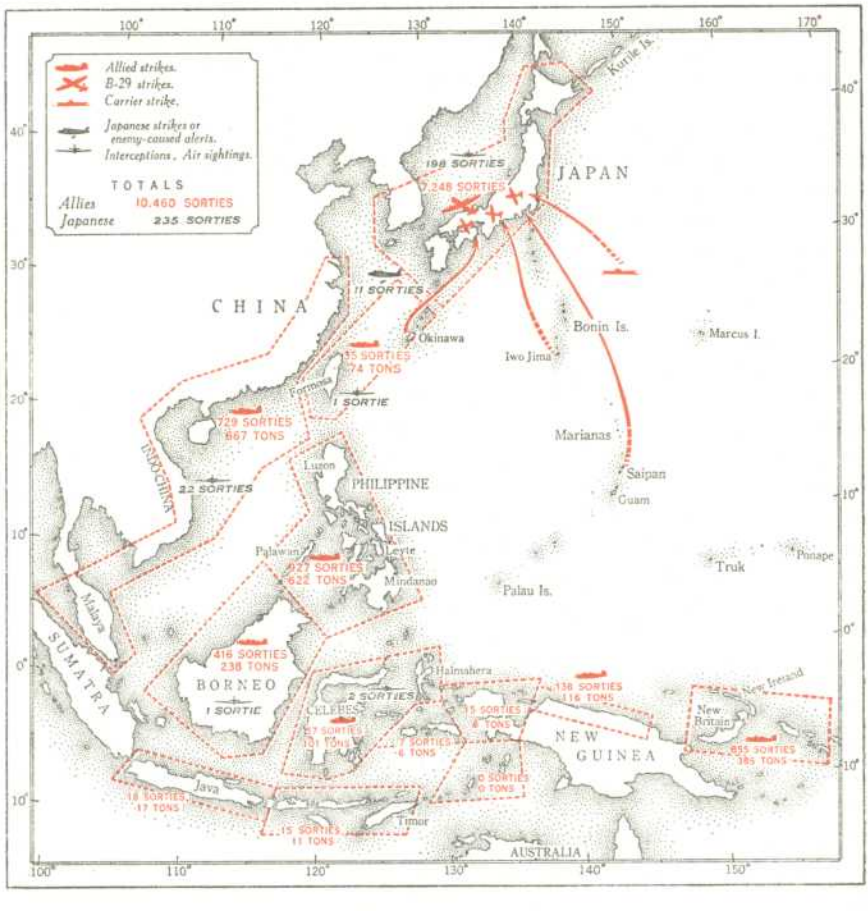
In one week of July 1945, no fewer than 10,460 aircraft sorties had been sent against the Japanese forces and Japan itself. The Japanese, carefully husbanding their few remaining aircraft for the expected invasion, had mounted a mere 235 sorties in reply. The United States Third Fleet, reinforced by the British Pacific Fleet, had roamed at will during July in Japan's home waters, shelling industrial areas along the coasts and sending squadron after squadron of aircraft to bomb and strafe cities and communications. Japan's remaining war industry and livelihood had been crumbling under these blows, and those of the Superfortresses of the Twentieth Air Force, which were scattering fire bombs and explosives on the industrial centres.

Air bombardment had cost the Japanese 806,000 casualties, of whom 330,000 were fatal.[1] General Kawabe, who commanded the Japanese Army Air Forces, said that after the loss of Okinawa the Japanese air force withdrew its aircraft (some 5,000) from the fighting altogether so that it would have a force intact to resist invasion when it came, but the situation deteriorated so much that the Emperor decided to end the war.

After the fall of the Philippines and Okinawa, General MacArthur had made ready for the final campaigns against Japan. He had been preparing a three-pronged assault on southern Kyushu for November of 1945 (Operation OLYMPIC). This was to be followed, if necessary, by a landing on Honshu in which MacArthur would use three American armies (including the First Army redeployed from Europe) to destroy the Japanese forces on the main island and occupy the Tokyo-Yokohama area. This was to be Operation CORONET. In the meantime the strategic

[1] US Strategic Bombing Survey, *Pacific War Summary*, p. 20.

air offensive, complemented by air and naval blockade, was to go on. It had been considered that this policy might result in the Japanese capitulating without an invasion. If, however, an invasion proved necessary, then the Japanese will to resist would be depleted and the land campaign in Japan would be easier and Allied lives would be saved. But operations OLYMPIC and CORONET proved unnecessary.




For months the Japanese Government had been seeking a way out of the war. The Emperor, after the fall of Okinawa, had told the members of the Supreme War Direction Council on 22nd June that they should consider ending the war. At this meeting of the Council he told them that the war had been waged for three years and a half and its havoc was becoming more intense. He said that although it had always been important for those engaged in battles to exert their utmost, he felt that something must be done to end the war.[2]

[2] Admiral Toyoda (interrogation, Historical Div, GHQ Tokyo).

Admiral Toyoda, speaking after the war of the situation in early June 1945, said:

> Conditions were such that Okinawa was already totally lost, the sea blockade of the Japanese homeland was so complete that neither procurement of overseas resources nor reinforcement of expeditionary troops were any longer possible; enemy air raids against the homeland were intensified day by day and loss and drop in production of military supplies were great. The navy had lost virtually all of its surface forces and had no heavy oil. . . . The nation's fighting power both military and civil became paralyzingly deteriorated to a high degree and from a purely operational standpoint it was utterly impossible to hope for a successful conduct of the war. . . . In July of 1945, the month's production of aircraft had fallen to around 600, less than half of the previous year.

On 10th July the Emperor had been in touch with his Foreign Minister and had suggested a Special Ambassador should be sent to Moscow without delay. Ambassador Sato in Moscow had approached the Vice-Commissar of Foreign Affairs with this proposal on 13th July, but had been told that Stalin and Molotov were both about to depart for Potsdam. The actual answer received on 8th August was the breaking off of diplomatic relations. At this stage no member of the Japanese Supreme War Direction Council had any fundamental objection to ending the war.

The Emperor had called an Imperial Conference on the night 9th-10th August and it had agreed that, subject to the Emperor's position not being affected, the terms of the Potsdam declaration would be accepted. The decision had been made by the Emperor himself who said: "I have decided to endure what is unendurable and to accept the terms of the Potsdam Declaration."

The use of the atomic bomb and the entry of Russia into the Pacific war had not been the direct causes of the ending of the war, but they were two factors which enabled the Japanese leaders to bring the war to an end without internal chaos. The Japanese Army had been thinking still of a fight to the last in the homeland. Premature efforts on the part of the Government to end the war while the people still believed they had a chance to win would have caused internal strife.

On 10th August, Tokyo Radio had broadcast the statement that Japan was willing to surrender, provided the Emperor's prerogatives were not impaired by the terms. On the 11th the Swiss Legation in Washington had been informed that the American view on the position of Emperor Hirohito was that the Allied Military Commander of the occupation forces would control Japan through the Emperor. On the 14th the Japanese had agreed and President Truman at once announced the end of the war.

The formal surrender of Japan took place aboard the American battleship *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2nd September, and occupation forces then began reducing Japan to military impotence by occupying the four main islands of Hokkaido, Honshu, Shikoku and Kyushu, and disarming the soldiers.

To the thousands of men serving in the islands north of Australia, the end of the war meant home and normal life again. The news was taken quietly in some squadrons, but for the most part it was celebrated with

great gusto. At the same time, the atomic bomb, with its terrible implications for the future, was in the thoughts of everyone.

The fighting was over but there was still much to be done. The First T.A.F. and other R.A.A.F. formations began to organise the succour and repatriation of prisoners of war held by the Japanese. This was an urgent task because thousands of them were starving and in need of medical attention. On 16th August, an Australian aircraft from Labuan flew over Kuching compound, dropping messages to prisoners and telling them of the Allied victory. Food, clothing and medical supplies followed. Catalinas flew 10,000 pounds of blood plasma, penicillin and quinine to the 5,000 Australians in Singapore, some 1,200 of whom were known to be in urgent need of medical attention. Late in August, plans were drawn up for the repatriation of the prisoners, time-expired servicemen and hospital "walking" cases from the islands to Australia.

The air force's No. 2 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit was largely responsible for the evacuation of the prisoners. Members of this unit, headed by Wing Commander Game,[3] left Morotai on 10th September, arriving at Singapore on the 12th. The following day, some ninety-five Australians were evacuated from Singapore to Labuan. On 14th September the unit began flying Australians from the Malayan peninsula, Sumatra, Burma and Siam into Singapore. At the end of September, twenty-four members of the R.A.A.F., mainly from No. 1 Squadron lost in Malaya and the N.E.I. in 1942, were recovered from Siam and brought into Singapore. As the prisoners were recovered and flown to Singapore, others were evacuated to Australia in Dakota and Catalina aircraft.

Parties of Australian nurses and medical orderlies often found the Japanese still in control when they arrived to take prisoners away. On the whole, the Japanese were cooperative and helped in the work of recovery. When the war ended they had gathered the prisoners into easily accessible centres. Many prisoners, however, were found to be in the final stages of starvation.

Difficulty was experienced in recovering prisoners from Indonesia where natives were showing hostility. It was very marked in Surabaya, where Senior Sister Budd,[4] who flew there in an aircraft captained by Wing Commander Purvis,[5] related how "all night long loaded lorries of whooping natives raced up and down the streets". "It seems," she said at the time, "that the Japanese have granted the native Indonesians right of free Government and they are greatly resenting the fact that their former white masters the Dutch are again to take over. So they have flown their flag from every vantage point, armed themselves with thick bamboo sticks—sharpened and sometimes steel-pointed—and are prepared to attack and eject every Dutchman who returns to re-establish himself in this town. . . .

[3] W Cdr J. A. Game, 281216. Staff Offr to DGMS RAAF 1941-44; Staff Offr Medical Adv RAAF Cd Morotai 1945. Senior RAAF Offr 2 Med Evac Unit 1945. Medical practitioner; of Adelaide; b. Launceston, Tas, 3 Jun 1915.

[4] Senior Sister A. M. Budd, 500010. 2 RAAF Hospital and 2 Medical Air Evacuation Transport Unit. Nursing sister; of Rushworth, Vic; b. Kyabram, Vic, 8 Feb 1917.

[5] W Cdr G. H. Purvis, AFC, 260446. 6 and 13 Sqns; comd 36 Sqn 1942-44. Airlines pilot; of Melbourne: b. Cobar, NSW, 16 May 1909.

The Japanese of course still controlling the place, provided us with transport and an armed guard to escort us into the city. . . . On arrival we were informed that as the native population was in an angry mood no inmate of the hotel would be permitted out. . . ."

Purvis flew on to Den Pasar, Bali, where he recovered eight Australians who had been in Japanese hands for up to three years. On the return flight Purvis was to pick up more ex-prisoners. The Japanese at Bali advised him not to land at Surabaya because the situation there had deteriorated. On 3rd October, Purvis took off from Den Pasar and flew over Surabaya. He noticed that, where two days earlier the Japanese had guarded the airfield, about 2,000 natives armed with spears were now swarming all over the airfield and the city streets, so he decided to return to Singapore without landing there.

The greater part of all prisoner evacuations in the South-East Asia and South-West Pacific areas were carried out by the R.A.A.F. By 13th October, all evacuations to Singapore had been completed. No. 2 Medical Air Unit alone carried out 7,801 evacuations, mostly to Singapore. Of this number, 5,319 were Australian, including 165 R.A.A.F.

Prisoners interned in Japan and Korea were brought to a reception camp at Manila before being repatriated to Australia by a shuttle service of R.A.A.F. Liberators. A few more prisoners were picked up in Borneo and Celebes by squadrons of First T.A.F. A large percentage of those repatriated from Japan were in good condition compared with those from other areas and after a fourteen-days' rest period and good meals at their camp near Manila, had improved to the extent of putting on as much as three stone in weight.

For the repatriation of members of the R.A.A.F. from the islands, Liberators of No. 82 Wing and Mitchells of No. 79 Wing were converted to transports. These aircraft and transport Dakotas did much of the work of repatriation, shipping being scarce and unpredictable.

Troops and airmen were flown direct from Morotai to the capital cities in one-day flights. In spite of the efforts of the air transport, however, men due for evacuation were becoming impatient and many lost interest in their service duties. In February 1946, this restlessness led to a minor disturbance and demonstration at No. 60 Operational Base Unit, Morotai. After the prisoners and medical cases, airmen were sent home in accordance with their assessment under a points system. This system unfortunately deprived the R.A.A.F. units in the islands of their more experienced men, with the result that efficiency was affected.

Some of the bomber squadrons returned in their own aircraft, but the fighter wings were brought back largely by Liberty ships and the British aircraft carrier, *Glory*.

On 19th September 1945, the War Cabinet had decided that Australia would contribute naval, army and air force units to a British force of occupation in Japan. This force was to be known as the "British Commonwealth Occupation Force" and would include units from the United

Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and India. By agreement with the United States it would go to Japan where it would come under the direction of General MacArthur, who had been appointed "Supreme Commander, Allied Powers". An Australian officer was to be appointed as the inter-Service commander-in-chief of this British force and most of the headquarters staff was to be provided by Australia. The Australian component of the force was to comprise two cruisers and two destroyers, one brigade group, and three R.A.A.F. Mustang fighter squadrons.

The initial area allotted to the British Commonwealth Occupation Force was the prefecture of Hiroshima and its role was defined as:

(*a*) The safeguarding of Allied installations and of all Japanese installations awaiting demilitarisation.

(*b*) The demilitarisation and disposal of all Japanese installations and armaments.

The air component of the occupation force was organised into a tactical group known as BCAIR (British Commonwealth Air Force) and included one single-engined fighter wing made up of two R.A.F. Spitfire squadrons and a squadron of Corsairs from the Royal New Zealand Air Force; one single-engined fighter wing comprising three R.A.A.F. Mustang squadrons and one squadron of the R.A.F. Regiment. R.A.A.F. Headquarters decided to allot No. 81 Wing with a total establishment of 1,750 persons as its contribution to the force. In anticipation of its move to Japan, the squadrons of the wing, Nos. 76, 77 and 82, then at Labuan, North Borneo, were re-equipped with Mustang aircraft.

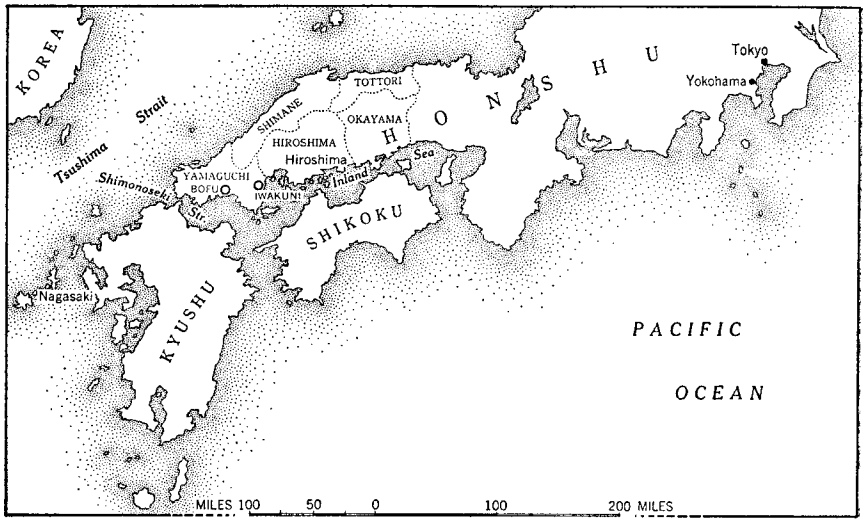
Volunteers were called for the occupation force late in August 1945. The response was good, not only from within No. 81 Wing but from other units. Conversion training for both pilots and maintenance staff was carried out and was virtually completed by the end of November.

In preparation for the arrival of the wing in Japan, Air Commodore Scherger, the air force representative on a combined Services mission to Japan, went to Japan to inspect airfields which might be suitable for use by the force. He found that major construction work would be needed to place any one of the available airfields into serviceable condition. Since the American works units would be fully employed on the construction of their own airfields, it was decided to send No. 5 Airfield Construction Squadron to Japan and in November it was placed under the control of No. 81 Fighter Wing Headquarters and became a unit of the occupation force.

At the end of 1945, Air Vice-Marshal Bouchier,[6] of the Royal Air Force, was appointed commander of BCAIR. He went to Japan with Lieut-General Northcott, the commander-in-chief of the British Commonwealth force, and decided to establish his headquarters and the majority of his flying squadrons at Iwakuni, in the Yamaguchi prefecture, southern Honshu. Iwakuni is about 450 miles west of Tokyo on the Inland Sea,

[6] AVM Sir Cecil Bouchier, KBE, CB, DFC. (1914-18: "A" Bty HAC, Palestine.) 11 Group 1938-39, 1941, 1943-45; comd RAF Sector Hornchurch 1940; AOC 221 Gp Burma 1945; AOC BCAIR 1946-48; Senior British Mil Liaison Offr in Far East 1950-53. Regular air force offr; of Cowley, Middlesex, Eng; b. 14 Oct 1895.

and was originally a Japanese naval air station. The main body of No. 81 Wing left Labuan by sea on 11th February for Japan, and later in the month the Mustang pilots commenced their move via the Philippines and Okinawa.




No. 76 Squadron R.A.A.F., commanded by Squadron Leader Wilson, was the first British squadron to move into Japan. It took off in two flights for the first stage of the trip on 28th February. On 9th March, after being held up for some days at Clark Field, Luzon, the first flight landed at Iwakuni and two days later moved on to Bofu where it was joined by the second flight which had flown there direct from Okinawa. On 2nd March twenty-five Mustangs of No. 82 Squadron, commanded by Squadron Leader Schaaf, left Labuan for Japan, arriving between 13th and 18th March. Three Mustangs of this squadron and an escorting Mosquito were lost within sixty miles of Bofu when extremely bad weather was encountered. The wreckage of two of these Mustangs and the bodies of the pilots were recovered later from Shikoku Island. The Mustangs of No. 77 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader Curtis,[7] arrived at Bofu on 21st March. The units of No. 81 Wing flew surveillance patrols over Yamaguchi, Hiroshima, Tottori, and Shimane prefectures and Shikoko Island. They kept a watch on the movements of vessels in the Inland Sea and Tsushima Strait to check the smuggling of aliens into the country, especially Koreans, who made for Hiroshima. In 1949, Nos. 76 and 82 Squadrons were withdrawn to Australia, leaving only No. 77 Squadron in Japan when, in June 1950, the Korean war began.

[7] Sqn Ldr R. P. Curtis, 400462. 45 Sqn RAF and 8 Sqn RIAF; comd 77 Sqn 1945-46. Jackeroo; of Sydney; b. Sydney, 12 Mar 1918.

When the war ended the total number of Australians serving in the R.A.A.F. was 154,511, of whom 137,208 were serving in the South-West Pacific theatre. The total casualties suffered by the R.A.A.F. in the war against Japan were 2,020 killed, 886 wounded, and 417 prisoners of war.[8]

This volume has recorded the history of the R.A.A.F. in the Pacific War and Burma in the years 1943, 1944 and 1945. Its operations in the Pacific were directed by an American air corps general who kept his own Fifth Air Force concentrated and used the Australian squadrons on his flanks (in eastern New Guinea and North-Western Area) and on anti-submarine operations around the Australian coast. The Fifth Air Force was consequently not only more concentrated in its deployment but, on the whole, equipped with better aircraft. While this policy prevented the R.A.A.F. from concentrating on the maintenance of a single strong field formation, the R.A.A.F. nevertheless contributed to the over-all success of the operations in 1943 and early 1944 which were directed towards the breaking of the Bismarcks barrier. The isolation of Rabaul, which took twelve months to accomplish, was a major strategic defeat for the Japanese. It was not so much that the enemy forces had lost an outer defensive bastion, but that in defending it they had expended aircraft and aircrews, naval and merchant shipping which they were never able to replace. The Japanese after the war were unanimous that their defeat round Rabaul was a result of their loss of air superiority.

While No. 9 Operational Group R.A.A.F. played an important part in this campaign, other Australian squadrons based in the Darwin area played a valuable role by defending MacArthur's flank. The enemy had a large army supported by an air force based in the islands north of Darwin in anticipation of an invasion from Darwin which never came.

In the final phase of the war the R.A.A.F's part, though it had wide ramifications, was again predominantly a flank-protection role, followed by garrison duties, and the invasion of Borneo. After a period in which the squadrons of No. 10 Group were used to cover invasion points along the north New Guinea coast, the R.A.A.F. was given a task under the direction of the Thirteenth Air Force to assist in neutralising the enemy in Dutch New Guinea, Halmahera and Celebes. The spirits of some of the pilots slumped, believing, as they did, that the targets they were called on to attack were not worthwhile, but, with the mounting of the Borneo operations, discontent passed and the squadrons carried out that support role with skill and much improved spirits.

After 1943 the air war in which the R.A.A.F. was engaged in the South-West Pacific was not an air war in the sense of two opposing air forces clashing in battle over each other's bases. In the last twelve months very few enemy aircraft appeared over or near R.A.A.F. bases. In the

[8] Because of the absence of anti-aircraft defences and strong concentrations of fighters on the scale encountered in the European theatres, air force casualties were relatively less heavy in the Pacific. In Europe and the Middle East the R.A.A.F. lost 6,612 killed, 1,374 wounded and 1,459 prisoners of war.

thousands of sorties flown by First Tactical Air Force in the last nine months of action, only five contacts were made with enemy airborne aircraft. The three Spitfire squadrons of No. 80 Wing, whose primary job was fighter defence against raiding enemy aircraft, shot down only three enemy aircraft—one at Morotai, one at Labuan and one at Balikpapan. Contact with enemy aircraft by Spitfires had been made only three times.

The infrequent meeting of R.A.A.F. aircraft and the enemy air forces in the last two years of the war was a result largely of the weakness of the enemy air force. After 1943 the Japanese air force had gone downhill rapidly. There is a danger that lessons might be drawn from the closing victorious years when everything was running smoothly, rather than from the difficult defensive early years. In 1947 Lord Tedder warned against this tendency. He said:

> The campaign is immensely simplified for a commander if he knows he can count on a blank cheque. Surely it is the problems of the early stages of the war which we should study. Those are the difficult problems; those are the practical problems which we and every democratic nation have to solve. There were no big battalions or blank cheques then. Here is the real and vital test of our defence policies. It is at the outset of war that time is the supreme factor.[9]

In the Pacific the R.A.A.F. had its first experience of a war in which its own integrated formations took part. Thousands of Australian airmen served in England, the Middle East and Burma, but although nominally in the R.A.A.F. they served in battle as part of the R.A.F., either individually or in squadrons. In the Pacific, however, the R.A.A.F. organised operational groups and later a Tactical Air Force, as well as the area formations, and Australian officers gained experience in organising and directing large air formations in war. The R.A.A.F. suffered from mistakes made in this theatre but at the same time it built up a body of knowledge and experience which might prove most valuable in the future.

[9] Lord Tedder, *Air Power in War*, p. 25.

APPENDIX

# ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

AA&QMG—*Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General*
AAF—*Allied Air Forces*
AALU—*Australian Air Liaison Unit*
AAU—*Air Ambulance Unit*
AC—*Aircraftman*
ACS—*Airfield Construction Squadron*
Act—*Acting*
ACW—*Aircraftwoman*
Adm—*Admiral*
Admin—*Administration*
AFC—*Air Force Cross, Australian Flying Corps*
AFU—*Advanced Flying Unit*
AG—*Air Gunner*
AIB—*Allied Intelligence Bureau*
AIF—*Australian Imperial Force*
Air Cmdre—*Air Commodore*
ALO—*Air Liaison Officer*
AMF—*Australian Military Forces*
ANGAU—*Australian New Guinea Administrative Unit*
ANS—*Air Navigation School, Advanced Navigation School*
AOC—*Air Officer Commanding*
AOC-in-C—*Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief*
AOP—*Air Observation Post*
AOS—*Air Observer School*
ARC—*Aircrew Reception Centre*
Asdic—*Shipborne apparatus for detecting submarines (from Allied Submarine Detection Investigation Committee of 1917)*
ASR—*Air-Sea Rescue*
Asst—*Assistant*
AVM—*Air Vice-Marshal*

Bde—*Brigade*
BM—*Brigade Major*
Bn—*Battalion*
Brig—*Brigadier*
Brig-Gen—*Brigadier-General*

Capt—*Captain*
CAS—*Chief of Air Staff*
CCS—*Combined Chiefs of Staff*
Cd—*Command*
Cdr—*Commander*
CGS—*Chief of General Staff*
C-in-C—*Commander-in-Chief*
CO—*Commanding Officer*
Col—*Colonel, Column*
Comdt—*Commandant*
Commn—*Communication*
Cpl—*Corporal*
CRTC—*Combat Replacement and Training Centre*
CS—*Chief of Staff*

DAOC—*Deputy Air Officer Commanding*
DAOC-in-C—*Deputy Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief*
DCAS—*Deputy Chief of Air Staff*
Dep—*Deputy*
Dir—*Director*
Div—*Division*
DUKW—*Rubber-tyred amphibious 2½-ton truck, used for short runs from ship to shore*

EATS—*Empire Air Training Scheme*
Ech—*Echelon*

FAA—*Fleet Air Arm*
FEAF—*Far East Air Force*
F-Lt—*Flight Lieutenant*
F-O—*Flying Officer*
F-Sgt—*Flight Sergeant*

Gen—*General*
GHQ—*General Headquarters*
"Gibson Girl"—*Small hand generated wireless transmitter*
Gp Capt—*Group Captain*
GR—*General Reconnaissance*

HBG—*Heavy Bombardment Group*
HQ—*Headquarters*

IFF—*Identification Friend-or-Foe; airborne radar identification device*
IG—*Inspector-General*
IJN—*Imperial Japanese Navy*
Inf bde—*Infantry brigade*
Intell—*Intelligence*
ITS—*Initial Training School*

JCS—*Joint Chiefs of Staff*

LAC—*Leading Aircraftman*
LASU—*Local Air Supply Unit*

LCI—*Landing Craft, Infantry*
LCT—*Landing Craft, Tank*
LHQ—*Land Headquarters*
LO—*Liaison Office, Liaison Officer*
LRPG—*Long-Range Penetration Group*
LST—*Landing ship, tank*
Lt-Col—*Lieut-Colonel*
Lt-Gen—*Lieut-General*

Maj—*Major*
Maj-Gen—*Major-General*
MG—*Machine-gun*
MHR—*Member of the House of Representatives*
MLA—*Member of Legislative Assembly*

NCO—*Non-commissioned Officer*
NEI—*Netherlands East Indies*
NT—*Northern Territory*

OBU—*Operational Base Unit*
Offr—*Officer*
OHQ—*Overseas Headquarters*
Orgn—*Organisation*
OTU—*Operational Training Unit*

PDRC—*Personnel Despatch and Reception Centre*
P-O—*Pilot Officer*
POW—*Prisoner of War*
PRC—*Personnel Reception Centre*
PRU—*Photographic and Reconnaissance Unit*
PT—*Patrol vessel*

RAAF—*Royal Australian Air Force*
RAF—*Royal Air Force*
RAN—*Royal Australian Navy*
Regt—*Regiment*
Reqmnts—*Requirements*
RFC—*Royal Flying Corps*
RIAF—*Royal Indian Air Force*
RNZAF—*Royal New Zealand Air Force*
RPP—*Reserve Personnel Pool*
RSU—*Repair and Salvage Unit*

SAO—*Senior Administrative Officer*
SASO—*Senior Air Staff Officer*
SFTS—*Service Flying Training School*
Sgt—*Sergeant*
Sigs—*Signals*
SNO—*Senior Naval Officer*
Sqn—*Squadron*
SSOA—*Senior Staff Officer Administration*
Stn—*Station*
SWPA—*South-West Pacific Area*

Tac-R—*Tactical Reconnaissance*
TAF—*Tactical Air Force*

USAAF—*United States Army Air Force*
USN—*United States Navy*

WAG—*Wireless Air Gunner*
W Cdr—*Wing Commander*
W-O—*Warrant Officer*
W-T—*Wireless Telegraphy, Wireless Telegraphist*

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